

TWO CAPTAINS

By

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AUTHOR 'S PREFACE

I recall a spring day in 1921, when Maxim Gorky first invited to his home a group of young Leningrad writers, myself among them. He lived in Kronwerk Street and the windows of his flat overlooked Alexandrovsky Park. We trooped in, so many of us that we took quite a time getting seated, the bolder ones closer to the host, the more timid on the ottoman, from which it was a job getting up afterwards—it was so soft and sagged almost to the floor. I shall always remember that ottoman of Gorky's. When I lowered myself on to it I saw my outstretched feet encased in shabby soldier's boots. I couldn't hide them away. As for getting up-it was not to be thought of. Those boots worried me until I noticed a pair just as bad, if not worse, on Vsevolod Ivanov, who was sitting next to Gorky.

Alice in her wonderland underwent strange transformations on almost every page of Carroll’s book. At one moment she becomes so small that she freely goes down a rabbit's hole, the next so tall that she can speak only with birds living in the tree-tops. Something like that was happening to me at Gorky's place. At one moment I thought I ought to put in a word of my own in the conversation that had started between Gorky and my older companions, a word so profound that it would make them all sit up. The next minute I shrank so small on that low uncomfortable ottoman that I felt a sort of Tom Thumb, not that brave little fellow we all know, but a somewhat timorous Tom Thumb, at once timorous and proud.

Gorky began to speak with approval about Ivanov's latest short story "The Brazier of Archangel Gabriel". It was this that started me on my transformations. Ivanov's story was far removed from anything that interested me in literature, and I took Gorky's high opinion of it as a harsh verdict on all my hopes and dreams. Gorky read the story out aloud. His face softened, his eyes grew tender and his gestures betrayed that benign mood so familiar to everyone who had seen Gorky in moments of pure rapture.

He dabbed his eyes with his handkerchief and began to speak about the story. His admiration for it did not prevent him from seeing its shortcomings. Some of his remarks applied even to the choice of words.

"What is the work of a writer?" he asked, and for the first time I heard some very curious things. The work of a writer, it appeared, was simply work, the daily, maybe hourly work of writing, writing on paper or in one's mind. It meant piles of rough copies, dozens of crossed-out versions. It meant patience, because talent imposed upon the writer a peculiar pattern of life in which patience was the most important thing of all. It was the life of Zola, who used to strap himself to his chair; of Goncharov, who took about twenty years writing his novel *Obryv* (Precipice); of Jack London, who died of fatigue, whatever his doctors may have said. It was hard life of self-dedication, full of trials and disappointments. "Don't you believe those who say that it is easy bread," Gorky said.

To describe a writer's work in all its diversity is no light task. I may get nearest to doing this by simply answering the numerous letters I have received in connection with my novel *Two Captains* and thus telling the story of how this one novel at least came to be written.

The questions my correspondents ask chiefly concern the two heroes of my novel—Sanya Grigoriev and Captain Tatarinov. Many of them ask whether it was my own life that I described in *Two Captains*. Some want to know whether the story of Captain Tatarinov was invented by me. Others search for the name in books of geography and encyclopaedias and are surprised to find that the activities of Captain Tatarinov have left no visible traces in the history of Arctic exploration. Some want to know where Sanya Grigoriev and Katya Tatarinova are living at present and what rank Sanya was promoted to after the war. Others ask the author's advice as to what job they should devote their lives. The mother of a boy, known as the terror of the town, whose pranks often verged on hooliganism, wrote me that after reading my novel her son had become a different person, and shortly afterwards I received a letter from Alexander Rokotov himself which showed that the boy was intelligent and talented as well as mischievous. Some years have passed since then, and student Rokotov of the Aviation Institute has acquired expert knowledge in aircraft construction.

It took me about five years to write this novel. When the first book was finished the war started, and it was not until 1944 that I returned to my work. The idea of writing this novel originated in 1937, after I had met a man whom I have portrayed in *Two Captains* under the name of Sanya Grigoriev. This man told me the story of his life-a life filled with hard work, self-dedication and love of his country. I made it a rule from the very first page not to invent anything, or hardly anything. In fact, even such a curious detail as the muteness of little Sanya has not been invented by me. His mother and father, his sister and friends have been described exactly as they first appeared to me in the narrative of my chance acquaintance, who afterwards became my friend. Of some of the personages of my future book I learned from him very little. Korablev, for example, was sketchily described in his narrative as a man with a quick searching eye, which invariably made the schoolchildren speak the truth; other characteristics were a moustache and a walking stick and a habit of sitting over a book late into the night. This outline had to be filled in by the author's imagination in order to create a character study of a Soviet schoolteacher.

The story, as told to me, was really a very simple one. It was the story of a boy who had had a cheerless childhood and was brought up by Soviet society, by people who had taken the place of his dead parents and had sustained in him the dream he had cherished in his ardent and honest heart since early childhood.

Nearly all the circumstances of this boy's life, and later of his youth and manhood, have been retained in the novel. His childhood years, however, were spent on the Volga and his school years in Tashkent-places with which I am not very familiar. I have therefore transferred the early scene of my book to my own hometown, which I have named Ensk. No wonder my fellow townsmen have so easily deciphered the town's real name. My school years (the senior forms) were spent in Moscow, and I have been able to describe in my book a Moscow school of the early twenties with greater authenticity than I could have achieved with a Tashkent school.

I might mention another question which my correspondents ask me, namely, to what extent the novel *Two Captains* is autobiographical. To a considerable extent everything, from the first to the last page, that Sanya Grigoriev has seen has been seen by the author with his own eyes.

Our two lives ran parallel, so to speak. But when Sanya Grigoriev's profession came into the book I had to drop the "personal" material and make a study of the life of pilots, of which I had known very little until then.

Invaluable assistance in studying aeronautics was given me by Senior Lieutenant S. Y. Klebanov, who died the death of a hero in 1943. He was a talented pilot, a brave officer and a fine, upright man. I was proud of his friendship. During my work on the second volume I came across (among the materials of the War Study Commission) testimonials of Klebanov's brother-officers showing that my high opinion of him was shared by his comrades.

It is difficult, well nigh impossible, to give any complete answer to the question of how one or another character of a literary work is created, especially if the narrative is in the first person. Apart from those observations, reminiscences, and impressions which I have mentioned, my book contains thousands of others which had no direct bearings on the story as told to me and which served as the groundwork for *Two Captains*. Imagination, as everyone knows, plays a tremendous role in a writer's work. And it is on this that one must speak before passing to the story of my second principal character Captain Tatarinov.

Don't look for his name in encyclopaedias or handbooks. Don't try to prove, as one pupil did at a geography lesson, that it was Tatarinov and not Vilkitsky who discovered Novaya Zemlya. For the older of my two captains I used the story of two brave explorers of the Arctic. One of them supplied me with the courageous character of a man pure in thought and clear in aim-qualities that bespeak a noble soul. This was Sedan. From the other I took the actual story of his voyage. This was Brusilov. The drift of my *St. Maria* repeats exactly the drift of Brusilov's *St. Anne*. The diaries of Navigating Officer Klimov quoted in my novel are based on the diary of Albanov, Navigating Officer of the *St. Anne,* one of the two surviving members of that tragic expedition. The historical material alone, however, did not seem enough to me. I knew that there lived in Leningrad a painter and writer by the name of Nikolai Pinegin, a friend of Sedov's and one of those who had brought his schooner the *St. Phocas* back to the mainland after the death of Sedov. We met, and Pinegin not only told me a lot more about Sedov and gave me a vivid picture of the man, but explained the tragedy of his life, the life of a great explorer slandered and refused recognition by reactionary circles of society in tsarist Russia. Incidentally, during one of my meetings with Pinegin the latter treated me to some tinned food which he had picked up at Cape Flora in 1914, and to my amazement I found it excellent. I mention this trivial detail because it is characteristic of Pinegin and of the range of interests into which I was drawn during my visits to this "Arctic home".

Later, when the first volume had already appeared, Sedov's widow gave me a lot of interesting information. The summer of 1941 found me working hard on the second volume, in which I intended to make wide use of the story of the famous airman Levanevsky. My plan was thought out, the materials were studied and the first chapters written. V. Y. Vize, the well-known scientist and Arctic explorer, approved the contents of the future "Arctic" chapters and told me many interesting things about the work of search parties. But the war broke out and I had to dismiss for a long time the very idea of finishing the novel. I wrote front-line

reportage, war sketches and short stories. However, the hope of being able to take up the novel again apparently did not leave me, otherwise I would not have found myself asking the editor of *Izvestia* to send me to the Northern Front. It was there, among the airmen and submarines of the Northern Fleet that I realised that the characters of my book would appear blurred and sketchy if I did not describe how, together with all the Soviet people, they had borne the dreadful ordeals of the war and won it.

I had known from books, reports and personal impressions what peacetime life was like among those people, who had worked to turn the Northern Country into a smiling hospitable land, who had tapped the incalculable resources that lay within the Arctic Circle, who had built towns, docks, mines and factories there. Now, during the war, I saw all this prodigious energy dedicated to the defence of this land and of these gains. I might be told that the same thing happened in every corner of our land. Of course it did, but the severe conditions of the North gave to it a special, expressive touch.

I don't think I have been able to answer all the questions of my correspondents. Who served as the prototype of Nikolai Antonich? Where did I get Nina Kapitonovna? What truth is there in the story of Sanya's and Katya's love?

To answer these questions I would have to ascertain, if only approximately, to what extent one or another figure was an actor in real life. As regards Nikolai Antonich, for instance, no such effort on my part would be needed. I have changed only a few outward features in my portrait of the real headmaster of the Moscow school which I finished in 1919. The same applies to Nina Kapitonovna, who could but recently be met in Sivtsev Vrazhek, wearing the same green jacket and carrying the same shopping bag. As for the love of Sanya and Katya, I had had only the youthful period of this story told to me. Exercising the prerogative of the novelist, I drew from this story my own conclusions, which seemed to me only natural for the hero of my book.

One schoolboy, by the way, wrote telling me that exactly the same thing had happened to him-he had fallen in love with a girl and kissed her in the school grounds. "So that now that your book *Two Captains* is finished, you can write about me," the boy suggested.

Here is another incident which, indirectly, answers the question as to what truth there is in the love of Sanya and Katya. One day I received a letter from Ordzhonikidze (Northern Caucasus) from a lady named Irina N. who wrote, "After reading your novel I feel certain that you are the man I have been looking for these last eighteen years. I am persuaded of this not only by the details of my life given in the novel, which could be known to you alone, but also by the places and even the dates of our meetings in Triumfalnaya Square and outside the Bolshoi Theatre..." I replied that I had never made any dates with my correspondent in Triumfalnaya Square or outside the Bolshoi Theatre, and that I would have to make inquiries of the Arctic pilot who had served as the prototype for my hero. But the war started and this strange correspondence broke off.

Irina N.'s letter reminds me of another incident, which equated literature, as it were, with real life. During the blockade of Leningrad, in the grim, forever memorable days of late autumn of 1941, the Leningrad Radio Broadcasting Committee asked me to convey a message to the

young Communists of the Baltic in the name of Sanya Grigoriev. I pointed out that although I had portrayed in Sanya Grigoriev a definite person, a bomber pilot, who was fighting at the time on the Central Front, he was nevertheless only a literary character.

"So what of it," was the answer. "It makes no difference. Write as if the name of your literary hero could be found in the telephone book."

I consented, of course. In the name of Sanya Grigoriev I wrote a message to the Komsomol boys and girls of Leningrad and the Baltic, and in response letters addressed to my literary hero came pouring in, expressing confidence in victory.

I remember myself a boy of nine entering my first library; it was quite a small one, but seemed very big to me then. Behind a tall barrier, under paraffin lamp, stood a smooth-haired woman in spectacles wearing a black dress with a white collar. The barrier was so high-at least to me-and the lady in black so forbidding that I all but turned tail. In a voice overloud through shyness I reported that I had already turned nine and was therefore entitled to become a card holder. The forbidding lady laughed and bending over the barrier the better to see the new reader retorted that she had heard of no such rule.

In the end, though, I managed to join the library, and the time flew so quickly in reading that one day I discovered with surprise that the barrier was not all that high, nor the lady as forbidding as I had first thought.

This was the first library in which I felt at home, and ever since then I have always had this feeling when coming into a house, large or small, in which there are bookshelves along the walls and people standing by them thinking only one thing-that these books were there to be read. So it was in childhood. And so it was in youth, with long hours spent in the vast Shchedrin public library in Leningrad. Working in the Archives Department, I penetrated into the very heart of the temple of temples. Raising my eyes-tired, because reading manuscripts makes them tire quickly-I watched the noiseless work of the librarians and experienced again and again a feeling of gratitude. That feeling has remained for a lifetime. Wherever I go, to whatever place fate brings me, I always ask first thing, "Is there a library here?" And when I am told, "There is," that town or township, farm or village, becomes closer, as if irradiating a warm, unexpected light.

In Schwarz's play "The Snow Queen", the privy councillor, a dour individual who deals in ice, asks the storyteller whether there are any children in the house, and on learning that there are, he shudders, because at the sound of children's voices the ice of the blackest soul melts. So does a house in which there are books differ from those in which there are none.

The best writers can be compared to scouts into the future, to those brave explorers of new and unknown spaces, of whom Fridtjof Nansen, the famous Norwegian explorer, wrote: "Let us follow the narrow tracks of the sled runners and those little black dots laying a railway, as it were, into the heart of the unknown. The wind howls and sweeps across these tracks leading into the snowy wastes. Soon they will disappear, but a trail has been blazed, we have acquired a new banner, and this deed will shine forever through the ages."

V. Kaverin

BOOK ONE





PART ONE

CHILDHOOD

CHAPTER ONE

THE LETTER. IN SEARCH OF THE BLUE CRAB

I remember the big dirty yard and the squat little houses with the fence round them. The yard stood on the edge of the river, and in the spring, when the flood-water subsided, it was littered with bits of wood and shells, and sometimes with things far more interesting. On one occasion, for instance, we found a postman's bag full of letters, and afterwards the waters brought down the postman himself and deposited him carefully on the bank. He was lying on his back, quite a young man, fair-haired, in postman's uniform with shining buttons; he must have polished them up before setting out on this last round.

A policeman took the bag, but Aunt Dasha kept the letters-they were soaking wet and of no further use to anybody. Not all of them were soaked though. The bag had been a new one, made of leather, and was closed tight. Every evening Aunt Dasha used to read one of the letters out, sometimes to me alone, sometimes to the whole yard. It was so interesting that even the old women, who used to go to Skovorodnikov's to play cards, would drop the game and join us. There was one letter which Aunt Dasha used to read more often than any other, so often, in fact, that I soon got to know it by heart. Many years have passed since then, but I can still remember it from the first word to the last. "Dear Maria Vasilievna,

"I hasten to inform you that Ivan Lvovich is alive and well. Four months ago, on his orders, I left the schooner along with thirteen of the crew. I hope to see you soon, so I shall not describe our difficult journey across the pack-ice to Franz Josef Land. We suffered terrible hardships and privations. I will only say that I was the only one of our party to reach Cape Flora safely (not counting a pair of frostbitten feet). I was picked up by the *St. Phocas,* of Lieutenant Sedov's Expedition, and taken to Archangel. Although I have survived, I have little reason to rejoice, as I shall soon be undergoing an operation, after which I can

only trust in God's mercy, for God alone knows how I'm going to live without feet. What I have to tell you is this.

The *St. Maria* became icebound in the Kara Sea and since October 1912 has been drifting steadily north with the Arctic icefields. When we left the schooner she was in latitude 82° 55'. She is standing in the middle of an icefield, or rather that was where she was from the autumn of 1912 until the day I left her. She may be free of the ice this year, but I think this is more likely to happen next year, when she will be round about the spot where the *Fram* broke free. The men who have remained in her have enough victuals to last until October or November of next year. In any case, I hasten to assure you that we did not leave the ship because she was in a hopeless plight. I had to carry out Captain's orders, of course, but I must admit that they fell in with my own wishes. When I was leaving the ship with the thirteen men, Ivan Lvovich gave me a packet addressed to the Head of the Hydrographical Board—who has since died-and a letter for you. I dare not risk mailing them, because, being the only survivor, I am anxious to preserve all evidence of my honourable conduct. I therefore ask you to send for them or come to Archangel yourself, as I shall be spending at least three months in hospital.

"Awaiting your reply, I remain your obedient servant.

"*I. Klimov,* Navigating Officer."

The address had been washed away, but had obviously been written in the same bold upright hand on the thick yellowed envelope.

This letter must have become for me something in the nature of a prayer, for I used to repeat it every evening while waiting for my father to come home.

He used to come in late from the wharf. The steamers arrived now every day and took on cargoes, not of flax and grain as they used to do, but of heavy cases containing cartridges and gun parts. Burly, thickset and moustached, he used to come in wearing a cloth cap and tarpaulin trousers. Mother would talk and talk, while he ate in silence, once in a while clearing his throat or wiping his moustache. Then he would take us children-my sister and me—and lie down to sleep. He smelt of hemp, sometimes of apples or grain, and sometimes of rancid machine-oil, and I remember what a depressing effect that smell had on me.

It must have been on one such cheerless evening, as I lay beside my father, that I first became aware of my surroundings. The squalid little room With its low ceiling, its walls pasted over with newspapers, and a big crack under the window through which drew cold air and the tang of the river-such was our home. The dark, beautiful woman with her hair let down, sleeping on the floor on two sacks filled with straw, was my mother. The little feet sticking out from under the patchwork quilt belonged to my sister. The dark skinny boy in the outsize trousers who crept shivering out of bed and stole into the yard was me.

A likely spot had been selected long ago, string had been prepared and even dry twigs piled up at the Gap; all I needed now to go out after the blue crabs was a piece of rotting meat. The bed of our river was all different colours, and so were the crabs in it—black, green, and yellow. These were baited with frogs and lured with a bonfire. But the blue crab, as all of us boys firmly believed, could only be taken with rotting meat. The day before I had had a stroke of luck at last: I had managed to steal

a piece of meat from Mother and kept it in the sun all day. It was putrid now—one did not have to take it into one's hand to find that out.

I ran down to the Gap along the river bank: here brushwood had been piled up for a fire. In the distance one could see the towers, Pokrovsky Tower on one bank, Spassky on the other. When the war broke out they were used as army leather goods depots. Pyotr Skovorodnikov used to say that devils once dwelt in Spassky Tower and that he had actually seen them ferrying over to our side, after which they had scuttled their boat and made their home Pokrovsky Tower. He said the devils were fond of smoking and drinking, they had bullet-heads, and many of them were lame, having hurt themselves when they dropped from the sky. In Pokrovsky Tower they raised families and in fine weather went down to the river to steal the tobacco which the fishermen tied to their nets to appease the water-sprites.

So I was not really surprised when, as I was blowing up my little fire, I saw a thin black shape in the gap of the old ramparts.

"What are you doing here, shaver?" the devil said, just like any ordinary human being.

I couldn't have answered him even if I had wanted to. All I could do was just stare and shake.

At that moment the moon sailed out from behind the clouds, and I could make out the figure of the watchman across the river, walking round the leather depot—a burly man with a rifle sticking up behind his back.

"Catching crabs?"

He sprang down lightly and squatted by the fire.

"What's the matter with you, swallowed your tongue, silly?"

No, it wasn't a devil. It was a skinny hatless man with a walking stick which he kept slapping against *his* leg. I couldn't make out *his* face, but I noticed he had nothing on under his jacket and was wearing a scarf in place of a shirt.

"Don't want to speak, you rascal, eh?" He prodded me with his stick. "Come on, answer me! Answer! Or I'll-"

Without getting up, he grabbed my leg and pulled me towards him. I gave a sort of croaky sound.

"Ah, you're a deaf mute, I see!"

He let go of me and sat there for quite a while, poking among the embers with his stick.

"Fine town, this," he said disgustedly. "A dog in every blessed yard; brutes of policemen. Damned crab-eaters!"

And he started to swear.

Had I known what was to happen within the hour, I should have tried to remember what he said, although just the same I could not have repeated his words to anybody. He went on swearing for quite a time, and even spat in the fire and gnashed his teeth. Then he fell silent, his head thrown back and knees clasped in his hands. I stole a glance at him and could have felt sorry for him had he not been so unpleasant.

Suddenly the man sprang to his feet. In a few minutes he was on the pontoon bridge, which the soldiers had recently put across the river, and I caught a last glimpse of him on the opposite bank before he disappeared.

My fire had gone out, but even without it I could see clearly that there wasn't a single blue crab among my catch, and a pretty good catch it

was. Just ordinary black crabs, none too big either—they went for a kopeck a pair at the local pub.

A cold wind began to draw from somewhere behind me. My trousers billowed out and I began to feel cold. It was time to go home. I was casting my line, baited with meat, for the last time when I saw the watchman on the opposite bank running down the slope. Spassky Tower stood high above the river and the hillside leading down to the river bank was littered with stones. There was no sign of anybody on the hillside, which was lit up brightly by the moon, yet for some reason the watchman unslung this rifle as he ran.

"Halt!"

He did not fire, but just clicked the bolt, and, at that very moment I saw the man he was after on the pontoon bridge. I am choosing my words carefully, because even now I am not quite certain it was the man, who, an hour ago, had been sitting by my fire. But I can still see the scene before my eyes: the quiet banks, the widening moon path on the water running straight from where I was to the barges of the pontoon bridge, and on the bridge the long shadows of two running figures.

The watchman ran heavily and once he even stopped to take breath. But the one who was running ahead seemed to find the going still harder, for he suddenly stopped and crouched down by the handrail. The watchman ran up to him, shouting, then suddenly reeled back, as if he had been struck from below. He hung on the handrail, slowly slipping down, while the murderer was already disappearing behind the rampart.

I don't know why, but that night no one was guarding the pontoon bridge. The sentry-box stood empty, and except for the watchman, who was lying on his side with his arms stretched forward, there was not a soul in sight. A large undressed hide lay beside him, and when, shaking with terror, I went up to him, he started to yawn slowly. Years afterwards I learned that many people yawn just before they die. Then he heaved a deep sigh, as though with relief, and grew still.

Not knowing what to do, I bent over him, then ran to the sentry-box—that was when I saw it was empty—and back again to the watchman. I couldn't even shout, not only because I was a mute at the time, but from sheer terror. Now voices could be heard from the bank, and I rushed back to the place where I had been fishing for crabs. Never again in my life did I run so fast; my heart hammered wildly and I could scarcely breathe. I had no time to cover up the crabs with grass and I lost half of them by the time I got home. But who cared about crabs then!

With a thumping heart I opened the door noiselessly. In the single room of our home it was dark, all were fast asleep and no one had seen me go and come. In a moment I was lying in my old place beside my father, but I could not fall asleep for a long time. Before my eyes was the moonlit bridge and on it the two long running shadows.

CHAPTER TWO

FATHER

Two vexations awaited me the next morning. For one thing, Mother had found the crabs and cooked them. There went my twenty kopeks and with them the hope of new hooks and spoonbait for catching pike. Secondly, I had lost my penknife. It was Father's knife, really, but as the blade was broken he had given it to me. I searched for it everywhere, inside the house and in the yard, but it seemed to have vanished into thin air.

The search kept me occupied till twelve o'clock when I had to go down to the wharf with Father's lunch. This was my duty, and very proud of it I was.

The men were still at work when I arrived. One wheelbarrow had got stuck between the planks and all traffic between the ship's side and the bank was stopped. The men behind were shouting and swearing, and two men were leaning their weight on a crowbar, trying to lift the barrow back into the wheel-track. Father passed round them in his leisurely way. He bent over and said something to them. That is how I have remembered him-a big man with a round, moustached face, broad-shouldered, lifting the heavily-laden wheelbarrow with ease. I was never to see him like that again.

He kept looking at me as he ate, as much as to say, "What's wrong, Sanya?" when a stout police-officer and three policemen appeared at the waterside. One of them shouted "Gaffer! "-that was what they called the ganger-and said something to him. The ganger gasped and crossed himself, and they all came towards us.

"Are you Ivan Grigoriev?" the officer asked, slipping his sword round behind him.

"Yes."

"Take him!" the police-officer cried, reddening. "He's arrested." Voices were raised in astonishment. Father stood up, and all fell silent.

"What for?" "None o' your lip! Grab him!"

The policemen went up to Father and laid hold of him. Father shook his shoulder, and they fell back, one of them drawing his sword.

"What is this, sir?" Father said. "Why are you arresting me? I'm not just anybody, everyone here knows me."

"Oh no they don't, my lad," the officer answered. "You're a criminal. Grab him!"

Again the policemen stepped towards Father. "Don't wave that herring about, you fool," Father said quietly through clenched teeth to the one who had drawn his sword. "I'm a family man, sir," he said, addressing the officer. "I've been working on this wharf for twenty years. What have I done? You tell'em all, so's they know what I'm being taken for. Otherwise people will really think I am a criminal."

"Playing the saint, eh?" the officer shouted. "Don't I know your kind! Come along!"

The policemen seemed to be hesitating. "Well?"

"Wait a minute, sir, I'll go myself," Father said. "Sanya," he bent down to me, "run along to your mother and tell her—Oh, you can't, of course, you're..."

He wanted to say that I was dumb, but checked himself. He never uttered that word, as though he hoped that one day I'd start speaking. He looked around in silence.

"I'll go with him, Ivan," said the ganger. "Don't worry." "Yes, do, Uncle Misha. And another thing..." Father got three rubles out of his pocket and handed them to the ganger. "Give them to her. Well, goodbye." They answered him in chorus.

He patted me on the head, saying: "Don't cry, Sanya." I didn't even know I was crying.

Even now I shudder at the memory of how Mother took on when she heard that Father had been arrested. She did not cry, but as soon as the ganger had gone, she sat down on the bed, and clenching her teeth, banged her head violently against the wall. My sister and I started howling, but she did not as much as glance at us. She kept beating her head against the wall, muttering something to herself. Then she got up, put on her shawl and went out.

Aunt Dasha managed the house for us all that day. We slept, or rather, my sister slept while I lay with open eyes, thinking, first about my father, how he had said goodbye to them all, then about the fat police-officer, then about his little boy in a sailor suit whom I had seen in the Governor's garden, then about the three-wheeler this boy had been riding (if only I had one like that!) and finally about nothing at all until mother came back. She looked dark and haggard, and Aunt Dasha ran up to her.

I don't know why, but it suddenly occurred to me that the policemen had hacked Father to pieces, and for several minutes I lay without stirring, beside myself with grief, hearing nothing. Then I realised that I was wrong: he was alive, but they wouldn't let Mother see him. Three times she repeated that they had arrested him for murder—the watchman had been killed in the night on the pontoon bridge-before I grasped that the night was last night, and the watchman was that very watchman, and the pontoon bridge was that very same bridge on which he had lain with outstretched arms. I jumped up, rushed to my mother and cried out. She took me in her arms. She must have thought I had taken fright. But I was already "speaking"...

If only I had been able to speak then!

I wanted to tell her everything, absolutely everything—how I had stolen away to the Sands to catch crabs and how the dark man with the walking stick had appeared in the gap in the ramparts and how he had sworn and ground his teeth and then spat in the fire and gone off. No easy thing for a boy of eight who could barely utter two or three inarticulate words.

"The children are upset too," Aunt Dasha said with a sigh when I had stopped, thinking I had made myself clear, and looked at Mother.

"It isn't that. He wants to tell me something. Is there something you know, Sanya?"

Oh, if only I could speak! I started again, describing what I had seen. Mother understood me better than anyone else, but this time I saw with despair that she did not understand a word. How could she? How far removed from that scene on the pontoon bridge were the attempts of

that thin, dark little boy to describe it, as he flung himself about the room, clad in nothing but his shirt. At one moment he threw himself upon the bed to show how soundly his father had slept that night, the next he jumped on to a chair and raised tightly clenched fists over a puzzled-looking Aunt Dasha.

After a while she made the sign of the cross over me. "The boys must have been beating him."

I shook my head vigorously.

"He's telling how they arrested his father," said Mother. "How the policeman threatened him. Isn't that right, Sanya?"

I started to cry, my face buried in her lap. She carried me to the bed and I lay there for a long time, listening to them talking and thinking how to communicate to them my amazing secret.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PETITION

I am sure that in the long run I would have managed it somehow, if Mother hadn't taken ill the next morning. She had always seemed a bit queer to me, but I had never seen her so queer before.

Previously, when she would suddenly start standing at the window for hours on end, or jumping up in the middle of the night and sitting at the table in her nightdress until the morning. Father would take her back to the home village for a few days, and she would come back recovered. But Father wasn't there any more, and, besides, it was doubtful whether the trip would have helped her now.

She stood in the passage, bareheaded and barefooted, and did not even turn her head when somebody came into the house. She was silent all the time, except when she uttered two or three words in a distracted manner.

What's more, she seemed to be afraid of me, somehow. When I started to "speak", she stopped up her ears with a tortured expression. She passed a hand over her eyes and forehead as if trying to recollect something. She was so queer that even Aunt Dasha crossed herself furtively when Mother, in answer to her pleadings, turned and fixed her with a dreadful stare.

It must have been a fortnight before she came round. She still had fits of absent-mindedness, but little by little she began to talk, go outside into the yard and work. Ever more often now the word "petition" was on her lips. The first to utter it was old Skovorodnikov, then Aunt Dasha picked it up, and after her the whole yard. A petition must be lodged!

That day Mother went out and took us with her-me and my sister. We were going to the "Chambers" to hand in a petition. The "Chambers" were a dark building behind tall iron railings in Market Square.

My sister and I waited for a long time, sitting on an iron seat in the dimly lit high-ceilinged corridor. Messengers hurried to and fro with

papers, doors slammed. Then Mother came back, seized my sister's hand, and we all started off at a run. The room we went into was barriered off, and I couldn't see the person to whom Mother was speaking and bowing humbly. But I heard a cold indifferent voice, and this voice, to my horror, was saying something which I alone in all the world could disprove.

"Ivan Grigoriev..." I heard the rustle of pages being turned over. "Article 1454 of the Criminal Code. Premeditated murder. What do you want, my dear woman?"

"Your Honour," my mother said in a tense unfamiliar voice, "he's not guilty. He never killed anyone."

"The court will go into that."

I had been standing all the time on tiptoes, my head thrown back so far that it bade fair to drop off, but all I could see across the barrier was a hand with long dry fingers, in which a pair of spectacles was being slowly dangled.



"Your Honour," Mother said again, "I want to hand in a petition to the court. Our whole yard has signed it."

"You may lodge a petition on payment of one ruble stamp duty."

"It's been paid. It wasn't his knife they found, Your Honour."

Knife? Had I heard aright?

"On that point we have the evidence of the accused himself."

"Maybe it was a week since he lost it."

Looking up, I could see Mother's lips trembling.

"Someone would have picked it up, my dear woman. Anyway, the court will go into that."

I heard nothing more. At that moment it dawned on me why my father had been arrested. It wasn't he, it was me who had lost that knife—an old clasp-knife with a wooden handle. The knife I had searched for the morning after the murder. The knife which could have dropped out of my pocket when I bent over the watchman on the pontoon bridge. The knife on whose handle Pyotr Skovorodnikov had burned out my name with a magnifying glass.

Looking back on it now I begin to realise that the officials who sat behind high barriers in dimly-lit halls would not have believed my story anyway. But at the time! The more I thought about it the heavier it weighed on my mind. It was my fault, then, that they had arrested Father. It was my fault that we were now going hungry. It was my fault that Mother had had to sell the new cloth coat for which she had been saving a whole year, my fault that she had had to go to the "Chambers" and speak in such an unfamiliar voice and bow so humbly to that unseen person with the long, horrible, dry fingers in which there slowly dangled a pair of spectacles.

Never before had I felt my dumbness so strongly.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE VILLAGE

The last of the rafts had passed down the river. The lights in the rafters' drifting huts were no longer visible at night when I woke up. There was emptiness on the river, emptiness in the yard and emptiness in the house.

Mother did washing in the hospital. She left the house first thing in the morning while we were still asleep, and I went to the Skovorodnikovs and listened to the old man swearing to himself.

Grey and unkempt, in steel-rimmed glasses, he sat on a low leather-covered stool in the little dark kitchen, stitching boots. When he was not stitching boots he was making nets or carving figures of birds and horses out of aspen wood. He had brought this trade with him from the Volga, where he had been born.

He was fond of me, probably because I was the only person he could talk to without being answered back. He cursed doctors, officials, tradesmen, and, with especial virulence, priests.

"If a man be dying, dare he murmur against it? The priests say no. But I say yes! What is murmuring?"

I didn't know what murmuring meant.

"Murmuring is discontent. And what is discontent? It's wanting more than's been allotted to you. The priests say you mustn't. Why?"

I didn't know why.

"Because 'dust thou art and to dust thou shalt return'. To the earth, that is."

He gave a bitter laugh.

"And what does the earth need? No more than is allotted to it."

So it was autumn now, and even the crabs, which had lately become a staple item in our domestic fare, had hidden themselves away in their holes and refused to be enticed out by my frogs. We were going hungry, and Mother finally decided to send me and my sister to the village.

I had never been in the country, but I knew that my father had a farm there. A farm! How disappointed I was on discovering that this was simply a cottage with a household plot, a little, overgrown vegetable garden in the middle of which stood a few aged apple trees.

The house was a small one, which having once slumped on its side, remained leaning sideways. The roof was tilted, the window-panes were smashed and the base logs were bent. The Russian stove seemed to be all right until we started a fire in it. Smoke-blackened benches were ranged around the walls, and in one corner hung an icon, on whose grimy panels a face could just be made out.

Whatever its faults, it was our house, and we undid our bundles, stuffed out mattresses with straw, glazed the windows and settled down to live in it.

Mother stayed with us only about three weeks, then went back to town. Grandma Petrovna agreed to take her place. She was Father's aunt, and that made her a sort of grandmother to us. She was a kind-hearted old woman, even though it was hard to get used to her grey beard and moustache. The only drawback was that she herself needed looking after. In fact, my sister and I looked after her all the winter, carrying water and heating her stove, since her cottage, which was little better than ours, was quite close.

That winter I grew attached to my sister. She was getting on for eight. Everyone in our family was dark, but she was fair, with fuzzy little pigtails and blue eyes. We were all rather taciturn, especially Mother, but my sister would start off talking the moment she opened her eyes. I never saw her cry, and it was the easiest thing in the world to make her laugh. Her name was Sanya, too, the same as mine—1 being Alexander and she Alexandra. Aunt Dasha had taught her to sing, and every evening she sang long songs in such a serious, thin little voice that you couldn't help laughing.

And how handy she was at housekeeping, and she only seven, mind you! Of course, running the house was a simple affair—in one corner of the attic lay potatoes, in another beets, cabbages, onions and salt. For bread we went to Petrovna's.

So there we were, two children in an empty house, in a remote snowed-up village. Every morning we used to tread a path in the snow to Petrovna's cottage. Only in the evenings did we feel a bit scared. It was so quiet you could almost hear the soft sound of the falling snow, and amidst this stillness the wind would suddenly start moaning in the chimney.

CHAPTER FIVE

DOCTOR IVAN IVANOVICH.

I LEARN TO SPEAK

Then one evening, when we had just gone to bed and my sister had just fallen silent, dropping off to sleep as she always did with the last uttered word, and that saddening hush fell upon the world, with the wind beginning to moan in the chimney, I heard a tap on the window.

A tall bearded man in a sheepskin coat and cap with ear-flaps stood there; he was so stiff with cold that when I lit the lamp and let him in he could not even close the door behind him. Screening the light with my hand, I noticed that his nose was quite white—frost-nipped. He bent to take off his knapsack and suddenly sat down on the floor.

That was how he first appeared before me, the man I am indebted to for being able to write this story—frozen almost to death, crawling towards me on all fours. He tried to put his trembling fingers into his mouth, and sat on the floor breathing heavily. I started to help him off with his coat. He muttered something and slumped over on his side in a dead faint.

I had once seen Mother lying in a faint and Aunt Dasha had breathed into her mouth. I did exactly the same now. My visitor was lying by the warm stove and I don't know what it was in the end that brought him round; I only knew that I blew like mad till I felt dizzy. However that may be, he came to, sat up and began warming himself up vigorously. The colour returned to his nose. He even attempted a smile when I poured him out a mug of hot water.

"Are you children alone here?"

Before Sanya could answer "Yes," the man was asleep. He dropped off so suddenly that I was afraid he had died. But as though in answer to my thoughts he started to snore.

He came round properly the next day. I woke up to find him sitting on the stove ledge with my sister and they were talking. She already knew that his name was Ivan Ivanovich, that he had lost his way, and that we were not to say a word about him to anyone, otherwise they'd put him in irons. I remember that my sister and I grasped at once that our visitor was in some sort of danger and we tacitly decided never to breathe a word about him to anyone. It was easier for me, of course, to keep quiet, than it was for Sanya.

Ivan Ivanovich sat on the stove ledge with his hands tucked under him, listening while she chattered away. He had been told everything: that Father had been put in prison, that we handed in a petition, that Mother had brought us here and gone back to town, that I was dumb, that Grandma Petrovna lived here—second house from the well—and that she, too, had a beard, only it was smaller and grey.

"Ah, you little darlings," said Ivan Ivanovich, jumping down from the stove.

He had light-coloured eyes, but his beard was black and smooth. At first I thought it strange that he made so many unnecessary gestures; it seemed as if at any moment he would reach for his ear round the back of his head or scratch the sole of his foot. But I soon got used to him. When

talking, he would suddenly pick something up and begin tossing it in the air or balancing it on his hand like a juggler.

"I say, children, I'm a doctor, you know," he said one day. "You just tell me if there's anything wrong with you. I'll put you right in a tick."

We were both well, but for some reason he refused to go and see the village elder, whose daughter was sick.

But in such a position
I'm in a terrible funk
In case the Inquisition
Is tipped off by the monk,

he said with a laugh,

It was from him that I first heard poetry. He often quoted verses, sometimes even sang them or muttered them, his eyebrows raised as he squatted before the fire Turkish fashion.

At first he seemed pleased that I couldn't ask him anything, especially when he woke up in the night at the slightest sound of steps outside the window and lay for a long time leaning on his elbow, listening. Or when he hid himself in the attic and sat there till dark—he spent a whole day there once, I remember. St. George's Day it was. Or when he refused to meet Petrovna.

But after two or three days he became interested in my dumbness.

"Why don't you speak? Don't you want to?"

I looked at him in silence.

"I tell you, you must speak. You can hear, so you ought to be able to speak. It's a very rare case yours—I mean being dumb but not deaf. Maybe you're deaf and dumb?"

I shook my head.

"In that case we're going to make you speak."

He took some instruments from his knapsack, complained about the light being poor, though it was a bright sunny day, and started fiddling about with my ear.

"Ear vulgaris," he remarked with satisfaction. "An ordinary ear."

He withdrew to a corner and whispered: "Sap."

"Did you hear that?"

I laughed.

"You've got a good ear, like a dog's." He winked at Sanya who was staring at us open-mouthed. "You can hear splendidly. Why the dickens don't you speak then?"

He took my tongue between his finger and thumb and pulled it out so far that I got frightened and made a croaky sound.

"What a throat you have, my dear chap! A regular Chaliapin. Well, well!"

He looked at me for a minute, then said gravely: "You'll have to learn, old chap. Can you talk to yourself at all? In your mind?"

He tapped my forehead.

"In your head—get me?"

I mumbled an affirmative.

"What about saying it aloud then? Say out loud whatever you can.' Now, then, say 'yes'."

I could hardly say anything. Nevertheless I did bring out a "yes".

"Fine! Try again."

I said it again.

"Now whistle."

I whistled.

"Now say 'oo'."

I said "oo".

"You're a lazybones, that's what the matter with you! Now, then, repeat after me..."

He did not know that I spoke everything in my mind. I'm sure that's the reason why I have remembered my earliest years so distinctly. But my dumb mental speech fell far short of all those "ees", '"os" and "yoos", of all those unfamiliar movements of lips, tongue and throat in which the simplest words got stuck. I managed to repeat after him separate sounds, chiefly vowel sounds, but putting them together and uttering them smoothly, without "barking", the way he bade me, was some job.

Three words I coped with at once: they were "ear", "mamma" and "stove". It was as if I had pronounced them before and merely had to recall them. As a matter of fact that's how it was. Mother told that I had begun to speak at the age of two and then had suddenly gone dumb after an illness.

My teacher slept on the floor, slipping some shiny metallic object under his mattress and using his sheepskin coat as a blanket, but I kept tossing about, drinking water, sitting up in bed and gazing at the frostwork on the window. I was thinking of how I would go home and start talking to Mother and Aunt Dasha. I recollected the moment when I first realised that I couldn't speak: it was in the evening, and Mother thought I was asleep; pale, erect, with black plaits hanging down in front, she gazed at me for a long time. It was then that there first occurred to me the bitter thought that was to poison my early years: "I'm not as good as others, and she's ashamed of me."

I kept repeating "ee", "o", "yoo" all night, too happy to go to sleep I did not doze off until dawn. Sanya woke me when the day was full.

"I've been over to Grandma's, and you're still asleep," she rattled off. "Grandma's kitten has got lost. Where's Ivan Ivanovich?"

His mattress lay on the floor and you could still see the depressions where his head, shoulders and legs had been. But Ivan Ivanovich himself was not there. He used to put his knapsack under his head, but that too was missing. He used to cover himself with his sheepskin coat, but that too was gone.

"Ivan Ivanovich!"

We ran up into the attic, but there was nobody there.

"I swear to God he was asleep when I went to Grandma's. I remember looking at him and thinking: while he's asleep I'll run over to Grandma's. Oh, Sanya, look!"

On the table lay a little black tube with two round knobs at the ends, one of them flat and slightly bigger, the other small and deeper. We remembered that Ivan Ivanovich had taken this from his knapsack together with other instruments when he had looked into my ear.

Where had he gone? Ivan Ivanovich!

He had vanished, gone without saying a word to anyone!

CHAPTER SIX

FATHER 'S DEATH.

I REFUSE TO SPEAK

All through the winter I practised speaking. First thing in the morning, barely awake, I uttered loudly six words which Ivan Ivanovich had instructed me to say every day: "hen", "saddle", "box", "snow", "drink" and "Abraham". How difficult it was! And how well, how differently my sister pronounced these words.

But I kept at it. I repeated them a thousand times a day, like an incantation that was to help me somehow. I even dreamed them. I dreamed of some mysterious Abraham putting a hen in a box or going out of the house in a hat, carrying a saddle on his shoulder.

My tongue would not obey me, my lips barely stirred. Many a time I felt like hitting Sanya, who could not help laughing at me. In the night I woke up, heavy with misery, feeling that II would never learn to speak and would always remain a freak, as my Mother had once called me. The next moment I was trying to pronounce that word too—"freak". I remember succeeding at last and falling asleep happy.

The day when, on waking up, I did not utter my six magic words, was one of the saddest in my life.

Petrovna woke us early that day, which was odd in itself, because it was we who usually went to her in the mornings to light the fire and put on the kettle. She came in, tapping her stick and stopped in front of the icon. She stood there for some time, muttering and crossing herself. Then she called to my sister and bade her light the lamp.

Years later, a grown-up man, I saw a picture of Baba-Yaga in a fairy-tale book. She was the image of Petrovna—the same bent, bearded figure leaning on a gnarled stick. But Petrovna was a kind Baba-Yaga, and that day ... that day she sat down on a bench with a heavy sigh, and I even thought I saw tears rolling down her beard. "Get down, Sanya!" she said. "Come to me." I went up to her.

"You're a big boy now, Sanya," she went on, patting me on the head. "Yesterday a letter came from your mother saying that Ivan is ill."
She wept.
"He was taken very bad in prison. His head and legs have swollen up. She writes that she doesn't know whether he's still alive or not." My sister started crying.

"Ah well, it's God's will," Petrovna said. "God's will," she repeated with angry vehemence and looked up at the icon again.

She had only told us that Father had fallen ill, but that evening, in church, I realised that he was dead. Grandma had taken us to church to "pray for *his* health", as she said.

Oddly enough, after three months spent in the village, I hardly knew anybody except two or three boys with whom I went: skiing. I never went anywhere because I was ashamed of my handicap. And now, in church, I saw our whole village-a crowd of women and old men, poorly dressed, silent and as cheerless as we were. They stood in darkness; candles were burning only in the front, where the priest was reading

prayers in a long-drawn-out manner. Many people were sighing and crossing themselves.

They were doing this because he was dead, and my sister and I were standing in the darkness of the church because he had died. And we were standing and "praying for his health" because he was dead.

Petrovna took my sister back with her, and I went home and sat on for a long time without lighting the lamp. The cockroaches, which Grandma had brought to us on purpose-for good luck—rustled on the cold stove. I ate potatoes and wept.

Dead, and I would never see him again! There they were, carrying him out of the Chambers, out of that room where Mother and I had handed in the petition... I stopped eating and clenched my teeth at the memory of that cold voice and the hand with the long dry fingers slowly dangling a pair of spectacles. You wait! I'll pay you back for this! Some day you'll be bowing to me, and I'll tell you: "My dear man, the court will go into this..." There they were, bearing the coffin down the corridor, while messengers hurried past with papers and nobody sees or cares to see him being carried out. Only Aunt Dasha comes forward to meet it in a black shawl, like a nun. She comes forward, weeping. Then we stop, someone stands at the door, the coffin sways in the men's hands and is lowered to the floor. Mother bows, and looking up, I can see her lips quivering.

I came to myself at the sound of my own voice. I must have been feverish, because I was uttering some incoherent nonsense, cursing myself and also, for some reason, my mother, and carrying on a conversation with Ivan Ivanovich, although I knew perfectly well that he had left long ago and that even his tracks in the field had kept for only two days until the snow had covered them up.

But I had spoken-spoken loudly and clearly! I could now speak and explain what had happened that night on the pontoon bridge;

I could show that knife was mine, that I had lost it when I bent over the murdered man. Too late! A whole lifetime too late; he was now beyond any help of mine.

I lay in the dark with my head in my hands. It was cold indoors, my feet were chilled, but I stayed like that till morning. I decided that I would not speak any more. Why should I? All the same he was dead and I would never see him again. It did not matter any more.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MOTHER

I have no very clear memory of the February Revolution, and until our return to town I did not understand that word. But I do remember associating all the strange excitement and puzzling talk around me with my nocturnal visitor who had taught me to speak.

Spring passed before I was aware of it. But summer began on the day when the *Neptune,* hooting and backing in a menacing way, moored alongside the wharf where Mother and us two had been waiting for it since the morning. We were going back to town. Mother was taking us home. She looked thinner and younger, and was wearing a new coat and a new brightly coloured shawl.

I had often thought, during the winter, of how astonished she would be to hear me speak. But she only embraced me and laughed. She had changed a lot during the winter. All the time she was thinking about something—I could tell that by the quick changes of expression in her face: at one moment she looked anxious and was silent, the next she smiled, all to herself. Petrovna decided that she was going mad, and one day she asked her about it. Mother smiled and said she wasn't. In our presence she rarely mentioned Father, but whenever she spoke kindly to me I knew she was thinking of him. My sister she had always loved.

On the boat her mind was busy all the time. She kept raising her eyebrows and shaking her head, as if arguing with somebody mentally.

How poor and neglected our yard seemed to me when we got home! That year nobody had seen to the drain ditches, and the muddy water with bits of wood floating on it, had remained standing under every porch. The low sheds looked more ramshackle than ever, and the gaps in the fence were wide enough to drive a cart through, while back of the Skovorodnikovs' house a mountain of stinking bones, hoofs and scraps of hides lay piled up.

The old man was making glue. "Everybody thinks this is just ordinary glue," he said to me. "It's an all-purpose glue. It'll fix anything—iron, glass, even bricks, if anyone's fool enough to want to glue bricks together. I invented it myself. Skovorodnikov's Skin Glue. And the stronger it stinks the stronger it sticks."

He regarded me suspiciously over the top of his glasses.

"Well, let's hear you say something."

I spoke. He nodded approvingly.

"Ah, that's too bad about Ivan!"

Aunt Dasha was away, and did not come back before a couple of weeks. If there was anyone I gladdened-and frightened too-it was she! We were sitting in the kitchen in the evening, and she kept asking me how we had lived in the village, and answered her own questions.

"Poor things, you must have felt pretty lonesome out there, all on your own. Who cooked for you? Petrovna? Petrovna."

"No, not Petrovna," I said suddenly. "We did our own cooking."

I shall never forget the look on Aunt Dasha's face when I uttered those words. Her mouth fell open and she shook her head and hiccupped.

"And we weren't lonely," I added, laughing heartily. "We missed you, though, Aunt Dasha. Why didn't you come to see us?"

She hugged me.

"My darling, what's this? You can speak? You're able to speak? And he keeps quiet, pretending, the young rascal! Well, tell me all about it."

And I told her about the freezing doctor who had knocked at our cottage one night, how we had hidden him for three days and nights, how he had taught me to say "ee", "o" and "yoo" and the word ‘ear'

CHAPTER EIGHT

PYOTR SKOVORODNIKOV

Aunt Dasha said that I had changed a lot since I had begun to speak. I felt this myself too. The previous summer I had shunned the other boys, restrained by a painful sense of my own deficiency. I was morbidly shy, sullen, and very sad. Now I was so different it was hard to believe.

In two or three months I had caught up with the boys of my own age. Pyotr Skovorodnikov, who was twelve, became my best friend. He was a lanky, ginger boy with a will of his own.

It was at Pyotr's that I saw books for the first time in my life. They were *Tales of Derringdo in Previous Wars, Yuri Miloslavsky* and *A Guide to Letter Writing* on the cover of which was a picture of a bewhiskered young man in a red shirt with a pen in his hand, and above him, in a pale-blue oval frame, young woman.

It was over this *Guide to Letter Writing* which we read together, that we became friends. There was something mysterious about those different modes of address: "My dear friend", or "Dear Sir". I was reminded of the navigating officer's letter and recited it aloud for the first time.

We were sitting in Cathedral Gardens. Across the river we could see OUT yard and the houses, looking very small, much smaller than they really were. There was tiny Aunt Dasha coming out onto her doorstep and sitting down there to clean fish. I could almost see the silvery scales flying about and falling glistening at her feet. And there was Karlusha, the town's madman, always scowling or grinning, walking along the bank and stopping at our gate-to talk to Aunt Dasha, probably.

I kept looking at them all the time I was reciting the letter. Pyotr listened attentively.

"Gee, isn't that smashing!" he said. "What a memory. I knew it, too, but I'd forgotten it." Unfortunately, we rarely spent our time together so well. Pyotr was busy; he was employed "selling cigarettes for the Chinese". The Chinese, who lived in the Pokrovsky quarter, made cigarettes and employed boys to sell them. I can see one of them as if he were before me now, a man named Li-small, sallow, with a weazened face, but fairly good-natured: he was considered more generous with the "treat" allowance than the other Chinese. This allowance formed our clear wage (later I, too, took up this trade). We were allowed to treat everyone-"Please, have a smoke"-but the customer who was naive enough to accept the invitation always paid cash down for it. This money was ours. The cigarettes were packed in boxes of two hundred and fifty, labelled "Katyk", "Alexander III", and we sold them at the railway station, alongside the trains, and on the boulevards.

The autumn of 1917 was drawing near, and I should not be telling the truth if I tried to make out that I saw, felt or in the least understood the profound significance of those days for me, for the entire country and the world at large. I saw nothing and understood nothing. I had even forgotten the vague excitement which I had experienced in the spring, when we were living in the country. I simply lived from day to day,

trading in cigarettes and catching crabs—yellow, green and grey crabs, with never any luck for a blue one.

This easy life was to end all too soon, however.

CHAPTER NINE

STROKE, STROKE, STROKE, FIVE, TWENTY, A HUNDRED...

He must have been coming to our place before we got back to town, because everyone in the yard knew him, and that attitude of faint amusement towards him on the part of the Skovorodnikovs and Aunt Dasha had already taken shape. But now he began to call nearly every day. Sometimes he brought something, but, honestly, I never ate a single of his plums, or his pods, or his caramels.

He had curly hair—even his moustache was curly—and he was pie-faced, but fairly well-built. He had a deep voice, which I found very unpleasant. He was taking treatment for black-heads, which were very noticeable on his swarthy skin. But for all his pimples and curls, for all his deep repulsive voice, Mother, unfortunately, had taken a fancy to him. Why else should he be visiting us almost every day? Yes, she liked him. She became quite a different woman when he was there, laughing and almost as talkative as he was. Once I found her sitting by herself, smiling, and I guessed from her face that she was thinking of him. On another occasion, when talking to Aunt Dasha, she said of someone: "Ever so many abnormalities." Those words were his.

His name was Timoshkin, but for some reason he called himself Scaramouch—to this day I can't make out what he meant by it. I only remember that he liked to tell my mother that "life had tossed him about like a twig". In saying this he would put on a meaningful look and gaze at Mother with an air of fatuous profundity.

And this Scaramouch now visited us every evening. Here is one such evening.

The kitchen lamp hangs on the wall and my shock-headed shadow covers the exercise book, ink-well and my hand as it moves the squeaky pen laboriously across the paper.

I am sitting at the table, my tongue pushing out my cheek with the effort of concentration, and tracing strokes with my pen-one stroke, a second, a third, a hundredth, a thousandth. I must have made a million strokes, because my teacher had declared that until they are "popindicular", I cannot make any further progress. He is sitting beside me, teaching me, with now and again an indulgent glance at Mother. He teaches me not only how to write, but how to live, too, and those endless stupid moralisings make me feel dizzy. The strokes come out wonky, pot-bellied, anything but straight and "popindicular".

"Every man's keen to snatch his titbit from life," he said. "And that's what everyone should go after, it's only natural, man is made that way. But will such a titbit guarantee security-that's another matter."

Stroke, stroke, stroke, five, twenty, a hundred...

"Now take me. I got into a difficult atmosphere from a child, and I could never count on my mother's labour power. That was out of the

question. On the contrary, when our domestic affairs went to wrack and ruin and my father, accused of horse-stealing, was sentenced to imprisonment, it was I, and no other, who was obliged to become the breadwinner."

Stroke, stroke, fat one, thin one, crooked one, five, twenty, a hundred...

"The saddest thing of all was that my father, on coming out of prison, took to drink, and when a man indulges in liquor his house goes to wrack and ruin. Then death struck him down, most sudden and untimely, being the result of his skinning the carcass of a horse."

I know exactly what happened afterwards to my teacher's father. He became bloated and "the coffin they'd started to make had to be altered in a hurry, because the figure of the dead man was three times its living size". I once dreamt of this horrid death.

Stroke, stroke, stroke... The pen squeaks, stroke, blot...

"And so our family hearth became desolated. But I did not lose heart and did not become a burden to my mother at the age of eleven."

My teacher looks at me. Though I'm only ten, I begin to fidget uneasily on my stool.

"I entered the employ of a restaurant, and became a servant and errand-boy, but was no longer an extra mouth living on my mother's earnings."

My mother is sitting at the same table, listening to him spellbound. She is mending shirts-Father's shirts-and I know who she is mending them for. It is with presentiment of ill that I look up at my mother's pale face, at her black hair parted in the middle, at her slim hands—and turn back to my strokes. I feel like drawing one long line through the strokes, they would make a lovely fence-but I mustn't. The strokes must be "popindicular".

"Meanwhile," Scaramouch goes on, "my mother became noticeably addicted to acts of charity. What do I do? Seeing that this tendency was adversely affecting my development I turned to my uncle Nikita Zuyev of never-to-be-forgotten memory, and asked him to influence my mother."

This was the hundredth time I was hearing about that uncle of never-to-be-forgotten memory, and I pictured a fat old man with the same pimply face arriving in the village in a wide country sledge, taking off his yellow sheepskin coat as he comes in, and crossing himself in front of the icon. He beats the mother, while little Scaramouch stands by and calmly watches his mother being beaten.

Strokes, strokes... But the fence is there already-done long ago, and though I know very well what I am in for, I quickly draw the sun, some birds and clouds above the fence. Scaramouch glances at me as he talks, and I hastily cover up the sun and the birds with my sleeve. Too late! He picks up my exercise book. His eyebrows go up. I stand up.

"Now just have a look, Aksinya Fyodorovna, what your dear little son has been doing!"

And my mother, who had never beaten us children while Father was alive, seizes my ear and bangs my head on the table.

My lessons came to an end the day that Scaramouch moved into our house. The day before that there had been the wedding, which Aunt Dasha, pleading illness, did not attend. I remember how smart Mother looked at the wedding. She wore a jacket of white velvet, a gift from the bridegroom, and had her hair done like a girl's, with braids wound

crosswise round her head. She talked and drank and smiled, but every now and then she passed her hand across her face with a strange expression. Scaramouch made a speech in which he drew attention to the service he was rendering the poor family, which was "definitely heading for ruin inasmuch as its erstwhile breadwinner had left behind him a scene of devastation", and mentioned, among other things, that he had opened to me the door of "general education", by which he evidently meant those "popindicular" strokes of his.

I don't think Mother heard the speech at all. She sat with lowered head at her bridegroom's side, and then, with a sudden frown, stared in front of her with a look of perplexity.

Skovorodnikov, who had been drinking heavily, went up to her and slapped her on the shoulder.

"Ah, Aksinya, you've given a lark to catch a..."

She smiled weakly, hastily.

For about two months after the wedding my stepfather worked in the wharf office, and though it was very painful to see him come in and sprawl in the place where my father used to sit, and eat with his spoon from his plate, life was bearable so long as I kept to myself, ran away and did not return home until he was asleep. But shortly he was kicked out of the office for some shady business, and then life became unbearable. The unhappy idea of taking in hand our upbringing, my and my sister's, entered that muddled head of his, and from then on I did not have a moment to myself.

Looking back, I realise that he had been employed in his youth as a servant. Obviously, he must have seen somewhere all those absurd and queer things he was making me and my sister perform.

First of all, he demanded that we come and greet him in the morning, though we slept on the floor within two paces of his bed. And we did so. But no power on earth could force me to say: "Good morning. Daddy!" It wasn't a good morning, and he wasn't Daddy. We dare not sit down at the table before him, and we had to ask permission to get up. We had to thank him, though Mother still did the washing at the hospital, and my sister cooked the dinner, which was bought with Mother's money and mine. I remember the despair that seized me when poor Sanya rose from the table and with the clumsy curtsy he had taught her, said for the first time: "Thank you, Daddy." I felt like throwing my plate with the unfinished porridge into that fat face! But I did not do it, and regret it to this day.

CHAPTER TEN

AUNT DASHA

I would not, perhaps, be recalling this period of my life were it not for the dear figure that rises before me—that of Aunt Dasha, whom, for the first time, I then came consciously to appreciate and love.

I used to go to her and just sit there, saying nothing—she knew everything as it was. To comfort me she used to tell me the story of her life. At twenty-five she was already a widow. Her husband had been

killed at the very beginning of the Russo-Japanese War. I learnt with surprise that she was not yet forty. I had thought her an old woman, especially when she put on her spectacles of an evening and read to us those letters which the flood-water had brought to our yard (she was still reading them). She read one letter every evening. It had become for her a sort of ritual. The ritual began with her trying to guess the contents of a letter from its envelope and from the address, which in most cases had been entirely washed away.

And then would come the reading, performed unhurriedly, with long sighs and grumblings when any words were illegible. Aunt Dasha rejoiced with the strangers in their joys and shared with them their sorrows; some she scolded, others she praised. In short, these letters might have been addressed to her personally, the way she took them. She read books in just the same way. She dealt with the family and love affairs of dukes and counts, heroes of the supplements to the *Homeland* magazine, as though all those dukes and counts lived in the yard next door.

"That Baron L., now," she would say animatedly, "I knew he would jilt Madame de Sans-le-Sou. My love, my love-and then this! A fine fellow, I must say!"

When, escaping from the presence of Scaramouch I spent the evenings with her, she was already finishing her mail, with only some fifteen letters left to read. Among them was one which I must quote here. Aunt Dasha could not understand it, but it seemed to me, already at that time, that it had some bearing on the letter of the navigating officer.



Here it is (the opening lines Aunt Dasha was unable to decipher):

"One thing I beg of you: do not trust that man! It can positively be said that we owe all our misfortunes to him alone. Suffice it to say that most of the sixty dogs he sold to us at Archangel had had to be shot while we were still at Novaya Zemlya. That's the price we had to pay for that good office. Not I alone, but the whole expedition send him our curses. We were taking a chance, we knew that we were running a risk, but we did not expect such a blow. It remains for us to do all we can. There is so much I could tell you about our voyage! Stories enough to last Katya a whole winter. But what a price we are having to pay, good God! I don't want you to think that our plight is hopeless. Still, you shouldn't look forward too much-"

Aunt Dasha read it hesitatingly, glancing at me over her spectacles with a schoolteacherish expression. I did not realise, listening to her, that within several years I would be making painful efforts to recall every word of this letter.

The letter was a long one, on seven or eight sheets—giving a detailed account of life on an icebound ship that was slowly drifting northwards. I was particularly amused to find out that there was ice even in the cabins and every morning it had to be hacked away with an axe.

I could recount in my own words how sailor Skachkov, while hunting a bear, had fallen to his death in a crevasse, or how everyone was worn out looking after sick engineer Tisse. But the only words I remember from the original were the few lines I have quoted here. Aunt Dasha went on with her reading and sighing, and shifting scenes rose before me as through a mist: white tents on white snow; panting dogs hauling sledges; a huge man, a giant in fur boots and a tall fur cap striding towards the sledges like a priest in a fur surplice.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A TALK WITH PYOTR

It was while hunched over my "popindicular" strokes that the idea of running away first occurred to me. I had not been drawing those birds and clouds above the fence for nothing! Afterwards I forgot this idea. But with each passing day I found it harder to return home.

I saw very little of my mother. She left the house while I was still asleep. Sometimes, when I woke up in the night, I would see her at the table. White as chalk from fatigue, she was eating slowly, and even Scaramouch quailed a little when he met her dark scowling gaze.

I was very fond of my sister. Sometimes I wished I wasn't. I remember that beast Scaramouch beating her cruelly because she had spilt a wineglassful of vegetable oil. He sent her from the table, but I secretly brought her some potatoes. She wept bitterly while she ate, then suddenly reminded herself of the coloured glass beads which she feared she had lost when he was beating her. The beads were found. She laughed, finished her potato and started crying again.

I suppose autumn was drawing near, because Pyotr and I, strolling in Cathedral Gardens, were kicking up dead leaves with our bare feet. Pyotr was making up a story about the old excavation under the hillside being a tunnel that ran under the river to the opposite bank. He even claimed to have walked through it halfway.

"I walked all night," Pyotr said in a casual way. "Skeletons all over the place. Rats too."

From the hill we could see the Pokrovsky Monastery on the high bluff of the river-a white building surrounded by low walls, beyond which stretched meadows, now pale green, now yellow, changing colours in the wind like a sea.

"There are no rats in Turkestan," Pyotr added thoughtfully. "They have jumping rabbits there, and field rats out in the steppe. But they're different-they eat grass, like rabbits."

He often talked about Turkestan. According to him, it was a city where pears, apples and oranges grew right in the streets, so that you could pick as many as you liked and nobody would plug you with a charge of salt in your backside the way the watchmen did in our orchards. People there slept on carpets in the open air, as there was no winter there, and went about in oriental robes—no boots or overcoats for you.

"Turks live there. All armed to the teeth. Curved swords with silver trimmings, knives in their girdles and cartridge belts across their chests. Let's go there, eh?"

I decided that he was joking. But he wasn't. Paling slightly, he suddenly turned away and gazed at the distant bank, where an old fisherman of our acquaintance was dozing over his fishing rods, which were mounted in the shingle at the water's edge. We said nothing for awhile.

"What about your Dad? Will he let you go?"

"Catch me asking him! He's got other things on his mind."

"What things?"

"He's going to marry," Pyotr said with contempt.

I was astounded.

"Who?"

"Aunt Dasha."

"Tell me another one."

"He told her that if she didn't marry him he'd sell the house and go round the villages tinning pots and pans. She refused at first, then she consented. Must be in love, I suppose," Pyotr added contemptuously and spat.

I couldn't believe it. Aunt Dasha! Marrying old Skovorodnikov?

Pyotr scowled and changed the subject. Two years ago his mother had died, and he, sobbing, beside himself, had wandered out of the yard and off such a long way that they found him with difficulty. I remembered how the boys used to tease him about it.

We talked a little more, then lay down on our backs with outspread arms and stared up into the sky. Pyotr said that if you lay like that for twenty minutes without blinking you could see the stars and the moon in broad daylight. So there we were, lying and gazing. The sky was clear and spacious: somewhere high up the clouds were chasing each other. My eyes had filled with tears, but I was trying with all my might not to blink. There was no sign of any moon, and as for the stars I guessed at once that Pyotr was fibbing.

Somewhere a motor started throbbing. I thought at first that it was an army truck revving at the wharf (the wharf was below us, under the ramparts). But the sound drew nearer. "It's an aeroplane," Pyotr said.

It was lit up by the sun, a grey shape resembling a beautiful winged fish. The clouds advanced towards it; it was flying against the wind. I was amazed to see how easily it avoided the clouds. Now it was already beyond the Pokrovsky Monastery, and a black cross-shaped shadow ran after it over the meadows on the other side of the river. Long after it had disappeared I fancied I could still see its tiny grey wings way out in the distance.

CHAPTER TWELVE

SCARAMOUCH JOINS THE DEATH BATTALION

Pyotr had an uncle in Moscow and our entire plan was built upon this uncle of his. The uncle worked on the railway-Pyotr would have me believe as engine-driver, but I suspected as fireman. At any rate, Pyotr had always called him a fireman. Five years before this engine-driver-cum-fireman had worked on Moscow-Tashkent trains. I am so exact about those five years because there had been no letters from this uncle now for five years. But Pyotr said this did not signify, because his uncle had always written very rarely; he was sure that he was still working on the same trains, all the more so since his last letter had come from Samara. We looked at the map together and found that Samara did indeed lie between Moscow and Tashkent.

In short, all we had to do was to find this uncle. Pyotr knew his address, but even if he didn't, one could always find a man by his name. We did not have the slightest doubt about the name-it was Skovorodnikov, the same as Pyotr's.

We envisaged the second stage of our journey as a simple matter of Pyotr's uncle taking us from Moscow to Tashkent on his locomotive. But how were we to get to Moscow?

Pyotr did not try to persuade me. He listened stony faced to my timid objections. He did not answer me: all was clear to him. The only thing clear to me was that but for Scaramouch I would not be going anywhere. And suddenly it turned out that Scaramouch himself was going away. He was going and I was staying.

It was a memorable day. He turned up in army uniform, in brand-new, shiny, squeaky boots, his cap tilted to one side and a cowlick of curls protruding from under it, and placed two hundred rubles on the table.

In those days this was an unheard of sum of money and Mother covered it with her hands in an involuntary gesture of greed.

But it was not the money that staggered me and Pyotr and all the boys in our yard—oh, no! It was a different thing altogether. On the sleeve of his army tunic were embroidered a skull and crossbones. My stepfather had joined a Death Battalion.

A man with a drum would suddenly appear at a public gathering or outdoor fete-wherever a crowd assembled. He would beat his drum to command silence. Then another man, usually an officer with the same skull and crossbones on his sleeve, would begin to speak. In the name of the Provisional Government he called upon all to join the Death Battalion. But though he declared that everyone who signed on would receive sixty rubles a month plus officer's kit and dislocation allowance, nobody cared to die for the Provisional Government and only rogues of my stepfather's type joined the death battalions.

But that day, when he came home solemn and grim in his new uniform, bringing two hundred rubles, nobody thought him a rogue. Even Aunt Dasha, who loathed him, came out and bowed to him in a stiff, unnatural way.

In the evening he invited guests and made a speech.

"All these procedures carried out by the authorities," he said, "are designed to safeguard the liberty of the revolution against the paupers, the absolute majority of whom consists of Jews. The paupers and the Bolsheviks are scheming a vile adventure, which is bound to jeopardise all the fruits of the existing regime. For us, champions of freedom, this tragedy is dealt with very simply. We are taking arms into our hands, and woe to him who, for the sake of gratifying his personal ambition, shall make an attempt upon the revolution and freedom! We have paid a high price for freedom. We will not surrender it cheaply. Such in general outline is the situation of the moment!"

Mother was very gay that evening. In her white velvet jacket, which became her so well, she moved round the guests with a bottle of wine and kept refilling each glass. Stepfather's friend, an amiable little fat man, who was also in the Death Battalion, stood up and respectfully proposed her health. He had laughed heartily during my stepfather's speech, but was now very grave. Raising his glass aloft, he clinked glasses with Mother and said briefly, "Hurrah!"

Everyone shouted "Hurrah". Mother was embarrassed. Slightly flushed, she stepped into the middle of the room and bowed low in the old-fashioned way.

"What a beauty!" the fat little man said aloud.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

JOURNEY'S END

It must have been some time past two; I had been asleep for quite a while and was awakened by a cry. Tobacco smoke hung motionless over the table; everyone had left long ago, and my stepfather lay asleep on the floor, his arms and legs spread wide. The cry was repeated. I recognised Aunt Dasha's voice and went to the window. A woman was lying in the yard and Aunt Dasha was blowing noisily into her mouth.

"Aunt Dasha!"

Not seeming to hear me, Aunt Dasha jumped up, ran round our house and knocked on the window.

"Water! Pyotr Ivanovich! Aksinya's lying out here!"

I opened the door. She came in and started to rouse my stepfather.

"Pyotr Ivanich! Oh, my God!" My stepfather did nothing but mumble. "Aksinya-she must be carried in - she must have fallen in the yard and hurt herself. Pyotr Ivanich!"

My stepfather sat up with closed eyes, then lay down again. We couldn't wake him and had to give it up.

We spent the whole night trying to bring Mother round and she did not come to herself until dawn. It had been an ordinary fainting fit, but in falling she had struck her head on the stones. Unfortunately we learnt of this from the doctor only the following evening. The doctor ordered

ice to be applied. But we all thought it odd to buy ice, and Aunt Dasha decided to apply a wet towel instead.

I remember Sanya running out into the yard to wet the towel in a bucket, and coming back wiping the tears away with the flat of her hand. Mother lay still, as pale as she always was. Not once did she ask about my stepfather, who the next day had joined his battalion, but she would not let me or my sister out other sight. She was racked by fits of nausea and kept screwing up her eyes every minute as though trying to make something out. This, for some reason, upset Aunt Dasha very much. She was laid up for three weeks and seemed to be on the mend. And then suddenly it "came over" her.

One morning I woke up towards daybreak to find her sitting on the bed, her bare feet lowered to the floor.

"Mum!"

She looked at me sullenly, and it dawned on me that she could not see me.

"Mum! Mamma!"

Still with the same intent, stern expression, she pushed my hands aside when I tried to get her back into bed.

From that day she stopped eating and the doctor ordered her to be fed forcibly with eggs and butter. It was excellent advice, but we had no money and there were neither eggs nor butter to be had in the town.

Aunt Dasha scolded her and wept, but Mother lay brooding, her black plaits lying across her breast, and not uttering a word. Only once, when Aunt Dasha announced in despair that she knew why Mother wasn't eating—it was because she did not want to live-Mother muttered something, frowned and turned away.

She had become very affectionate towards me since she was taken ill and even seemed to love me as much as she did my sister. Very often she looked at me steadily for a long time with a sort of surprise. She had never wept before her illness, but now she cried every day and I guess why. She was sorry she hadn't loved me before this and was remorseful at having forgotten Father, and maybe begging forgiveness for Scaramouch and for all that he had done to us. But a sort of stupefaction came over me. I couldn't put my hand to anything and my mind was a blank. Our last conversation together was like that too-neither I nor she had uttered a word. She only beckoned me and took my hand, shaking her head and trying hard to control her quivering lips. I realised that she wanted to say goodbye. But I stood there like a block of wood with my head lowered, staring doggedly down at the floor.

The next day she died.

My stepfather, in full dress uniform, with a rifle slung over his shoulder and a hand grenade at his belt, stood in the passage weeping, but no one paid any attention to him.

On the day of the funeral my sister had a headache and was made to stay at home. My stepfather, who had been called out to his battalion that morning, was late for the carrying-out, and after waiting a good two hours for him, we set out behind the coffin on our own— "we" being Skovorodnikov, Aunt Dasha and myself.

They walked. Aunt Dasha holding on to an iron ring to keep from lagging behind, while me they sat in the hearse.

As we were passing through Market Square I saw a sentry standing at the gates of the "Chambers" and some men in civilian clothes bustling

about in the garden behind the railings, one of them dragging a machine gun. The shops were closed, the streets deserted, and after Sergievsky Street we did not meet a soul. What was the matter?

The hearse driver in his dirty robe was in a hurry and kept whipping up the horse. It was all Aunt Dasha and Skovorodnikov could do to keep up with it. We came out onto Posadsky Common-a muddy patch of wasteland between the town and Posad suburb leading down to the river across Mill Bridge. A short sharp crackle rang out in the distance; the driver cast a frightened glance over his shoulder and hesitantly raised his whip. Aunt Dasha caught up with us and started to scold.
"Man alive! Are you crazy? You're not carting firewood!" "There's shooting over there," the driver growled. A path was dug out in the hillside leading down to the river, and we drove down it for several minutes without seeing anything on the sides. They were shooting somewhere, but less and less frequently. Mill Bridge, from which I had often fished for gudgeon, came into view. Suddenly the driver stood up and lashed out at the horse; it dashed off and we raced along the bank, leaving Skovorodnikov and Aunt Dasha far behind.

It must have been bullets, because chips of wood flew from the hearse and one of them hit me in the face. The carved wooden upright I was gripping for support creaked, shook loose and fell into the roadway as the hearse jolted. I heard Skovorodnikov shouting somewhere behind us, and Aunt Dasha scolding in a tearful voice.

Pulling his cap down lower and twirling his whip over his head, the driver drove the horse straight towards the bridge, as though he couldn't see that the approach to it was blocked with logs, planks and bricks. The horse reared, and stopped dead in its tracks.

Among the men who ran out from behind this barrier I recognised the compositor who had rented a room the previous summer at the fortune-teller's in the next yard to ours. He was carrying a rifle and inside the leather belt, which looked so odd over an ordinary overcoat, he wore a service revolver. They were all armed, some even with swords.

The driver clambered down, hitched up the skirt of Us robe, stuck his whip into his high boot and began to swear.

"What the hell-couldn't you see it's a funeral? You nearly shot my horse!"

"We weren't shooting, you came under the cadets' fire," the compositor said. "And couldn't you see there was a barricade here, you dolt?"

"What's your name?" the driver shouted. "You'll answer for this! Who's going to pay for repairs?" He walked round the hearse, touching the damaged places. "You've smashed one o' the spokes!"
"Fool!" the compositor said again. "Didn't I tell you it wasn't us! Why should we fire on coffins! Fathead!"

"Who are you burying, lad?" an elderly man in a tall fur cap, on which hung a piece of red ribbon in place of a cockade, asked me quietly.

"My mother," I brought out with difficulty.

He took off his cap.

"Quiet there, comrades," he said. "This is a funeral. This boy here is burying his mother. You ought to know better."

They all stared at me. I must have looked pretty wretched because, when everything was patched up and Aunt Dasha, weeping, had caught

up with us, and we had driven onto the bridge through the mill, I found in the pocket of my coat two lumps of sugar and a white biscuit.

Tired out, we returned home after the funeral by way of the opposite bank.

There was a glow in the sky over the town: the barracks of the Krasnoyarsk Regiment were on fire. At the pontoon bridge Skovorodnikov hailed a man of his acquaintance who was on point-duty, and they started a long conversation, from which I understood nothing: someone somewhere had pulled up the track, a cavalry corps was making for Petrograd, and the Death Battalion was holding the railway station. The name "Kerensky" kept cropping up all the time with various additions. I could hardly stand on my feet, and Aunt Dasha moaned and sighed.

My sister was asleep when we returned. Without undressing, I sat down next to her on the bed.

I don't know why, but Aunt Dasha did not spend that night with us, the first night we were left alone. She brought me some porridge, but I did not feel like eating, and she put the plate on the window-sill. *On* the window-sill, not on the table where Mother had lain that morning. That morning. And now it was night. Sanya was sleeping in *her* bed, in the place where she had been lying with that little wreath on her brow.

I got up and went over to the window. It was dark outside, and a fiery glow hung over the river, where bands of black smoke flared up with yellow streaks and died down.

The barracks were on fire they said, but it was beyond the railway, a long way off and in quite a different direction. I recalled how she had taken my hand, shaking her head and fighting back her tears. Why hadn't I said anything to her? She had so wanted me to say something, even if it was a single word.

I could hear the pebbles rolling up on the shore; the wind had probably risen and it started raining. For a long time, thinking of nothing, I watched the big heavy raindrops rolling down the window-pane, first slowly, then faster and faster.

I dreamt that someone pulled the door open, ran into the room and flung his wet army coat on the floor. It was some time before I realised that this was no dream. It was my stepfather, dashing about the house, pulling off his tunic as he ran. He tugged away at it, gnashing his teeth, but it clung to his back. At last, clad only in his trousers, he rushed over to his box and pulled a haversack out of it.

"Pyotr Ivanich!"

He glanced at me but did not answer. With matted hair, his face glistening with sweat, he was hastily thrusting linen into the haversack from the box. He rolled up a blanket, pressed it down with his knee and strapped it. All the time his mouth worked with vicious fury, and I could see his clenched teeth—the big, long teeth of a wolf.

He put on three shirts and shoved a fourth into his haversack. He must have forgotten that I was not asleep, or he would not have had the nerve to snatch Mother's velvet jacket from the nail on which it hung and thrust it into the haversack along with the rest.

"Pyotr Ivanich!"

"Shut up!" he said, looking up. "Go to hell, all of you!"

He changed his boots and put on his coat, then suddenly noticed the skull and crossbones on the sleeve. With an oath he threw the coat off

again and started ripping off the emblem with his teeth. He flung his haversack on his back and was gone—gone out of my life. All that remained were his muddy footmarks of the floor and the empty tin box of Katyk cigarettes in which he kept his studs and ' tiepins.

Everything became clear the next day. The Military Revolutionary Committee proclaimed Soviet power in the town. The Death Battalion and the volunteers who had come out against the Soviets had been defeated.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

WE RUN AWAY.
I PRETEND TO BE ASLEEP

Where did Pyotr get the idea that you could travel free now on all the railways? The rumour about free tramcars must have reached him in this exaggerated form.

"Grown-ups have to have official travel papers," he said with assurance. "But we don't need anything."

He was no longer silent. He remonstrated with me, teased me, accused me of cowardice, and sneered. Everything that was happening on Earth, merely went to prove, in his view, that we had to make tracks for Turkestan without a moment's delay. Old Skovorodnikov proclaimed himself a Bolshevik and made Aunt Dasha take down the icons. Pyotr cashed in on this situation by arguing that life in the yard would now be impossible.

I don't know whether he would have succeeded in the end in taking me into the venture had not Aunt Dasha and Skovorodnikov
decided in family council to place Sanya and me into an orphanage. With tears in her eyes Aunt Dasha declared that she would visit us at the orphanage every day, that she would put us in there only for the winter, and we would return for sure in the summer. In the orphanage we would be fed, taught and clothed. They would give us new boots, two shirts each, an overcoat and cap, stockings and drawers. I remember asking her, "What are drawers?"

We knew the orphanage children. They were sickly looking kids in grey jackets and crumpled grey trousers. They were ever so smart at shooting birds with their catapults; they afterwards roasted and ate the birds in their garden. That's how they were fed in the orphanage! Altogether they were a "bad lot", and we had scraps with them, and now I was to become one of them!

I went to Pyotr the same day and told him I was willing. We had very little money—only ten rubles. We sold Mother's boots in the second-hand market for another ten. That made it twenty. With the utmost precautions we removed a blanket from the house; with equal precaution we returned it; nobody had wanted to buy it, though we asked very little for it—four fifty, I believe. That was just the amount we had spent on food as we hawked our blanket round the market. Total: fifteen rubles fifty kopecks.

Pyotr wanted to flog his books, but luckily nobody bought them. I say "luckily", because those books now occupy a place of honour in my

library. On second thought, we did manage to sell one of *them-Yuri Miloslavsky,* I believe. Total: sixteen rubles.

We figured that this money would get us to Pyotr's uncle, and once there we had the thrilling prospect of life aboard a railway engine to look forward to. I remember the question whether we should carry arms or not caused no little argument. Pyotr had a knife; which he called a dagger. We made a sheath for it out of an old boot. Everything else was in order: stout boots, overcoats in good condition (Pyotr's even had a fur collar) and a pair of trousers apiece.

I was very gloomy that day and Aunt Dasha made several attempts to cheer me up. Poor Aunt Dasha! If she only knew that we had put off our departure because we were counting on her cookies. The next day she was to take Sanya and me down to the orphanage, and she spent the day baking cookies "for the road". She was baking them all day and kept taking off her glasses and blowing her nose.

She made me give a solemn promise not to steal, not to smoke, not to be rude, not to be lazy, not to get drunk, not to swear or fight—more taboos than there were in the Ten Commandments. To my little sister, who was very sad, she gave a magnificent ribbon of pre-war manufacture.

Of course, we could have simply slipped out of the house and disappeared. But Pyotr decided that this was too tame, and he drew up a rather intricate plan which had an air of fascinating mystery about it.

In the first place, we were to swear to each other a "blood-oath of friendship". It ran like this:

"Whoever breaks this oath shall receive no mercy until he has counted all the sand grains in the sea, all the leaves in the forest, all the raindrops falling from the sky. When he tries to go forward, he will go back, when he wants to go left he will go right. The moment I fling my cap to the ground thunderbolts shall strike him who breaks this oath. To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

We had to utter this oath in turn, then shake hands and fling our caps down together. This was performed in Cathedral Gardens on the eve of our departure. I recited the oath by heart, while Pyotr read it "off the cuff. After that he pricked his finger with a pin and wrote "P.S." on the paper in blood, the letters standing for Pyotr Skovorodnikov. I scrawled with some difficulty the initials "A.G.", standing for Alexander Grigoriev.

Secondly, I was to go to bed at ten and pretend to be asleep, though nobody was curious to know whether I was asleep or only pretending. At three in the morning Pyotr was to give three whistles outside the window—the prearranged signal that all was in order, the coast was clear and we could decamp.

This was far more dangerous than it would have been in the daytime, when things really were in order, the coast clear, and nobody would have noticed that we had run away. In the night we risked being grabbed by the patrols—the town was under martial law—and the dogs were let loose at night all along the river bank. But Pyotr commanded and I obeyed. And then came the crucial night, my last night in the paternal home.

Aunt Dasha was sitting at the table, mending my shirt. Though they provided you with linen at the orphanage, here was one shirt more, to be on the safe side. In front of her was the lamp with the blue shade

which had been Aunt Dasha's wedding presence Mother. It looked sort of abashed now, as though it felt ill at ease in our deserted house. It was dark in the corners. The kettle hung over the stove, but its shadow looked more like a huge upturned nose than a kettle. From a crack under the window came whiffs of cool air and the tang of the river. Aunt Dasha was sewing and talking. She took something from the table and the circle of light on the ceiling began to quiver. It was ten o'clock. I pretended to be asleep.

"Now mind, Sanya, you must always do as your brother tells you," Aunt Dasha was telling my sister. "Being a girl, you must lean on him. We womenfolk always lean on the men. He'll stand up for you."

My heart was wrung, but I tried not think of Sanya. "And you, too, Sanya," Aunt Dasha said to me, and I could see a tear creep down from under her glasses and fall on my shirt, "take care of your sister. You'll be in different sections, but I'll ask them to allow you to visit her every day."

"All right, Aunt Dasha."

"Ah, my God, if only Aksinya were alive..."

She turned up the wick, threaded her needle and took up her work again with a sigh.

I am not asleep, I am pretending to be asleep. Half past eleven. Twelve. Aunt Dasha gets up. For the last, the very last time I see her kind face above the lamp, lit up from below. She places her hand over the rim of the glass and blows. Darkness. She makes the sign of the cross over us in the dark and lies down. She is spending that night with us.

It's all very well to pretend you're asleep when you're not sleepy! I open my eyes with an effort. What's the time? Three o'clock is still a long way off. A sound of drunken singing comes from the river. The pebbles roll on the bank. But still there is no signal. Just the wall clock ticking and Aunt Dasha sighing as she tosses from side to side.

To keep awake, I sit up and rest my head on my knees. I am pretending to be asleep. I hear a whistle, but I can't wake up.

Afterwards Pyotr told me he had whistled himself as hoarse as a gypsy until he wakened me. But he kept whistling all the time I was putting on my boots and my overcoat and stuffing the cookings into the haversack. Was he cross! He ordered me to turn up the collar of my overcoat and we made off.

Everything went well. Nobody touched us—neither dogs nor men. To be on the safe side, though, we made a detour of about two miles round the town. On the way I tried to find out from Pyotr whether he was sure that travelling on the railways these days was free of charge. He told me he was sure; if the worst came to the worst we could hide under the seats. It was two nights' travel to Moscow. The passenger train was due to leave at 5.40.

But when, to avoid the patrols, we jumped the fence some half a mile from the station we found that there was no 5.40 train. The wet, black rails glinted dully, and yellow lanterns burned dimly at the points. What were we to do? Wait at the station till morning? Impossible: the patrols might catch us. Return home?

At that moment a bearded coupler all covered with grease, crawled out from under a freight train and came towards us, stepping over the sleepers.

"Please, mister," Pyotr accosted him boldly, "how do we get to Moscow from here-on the right or on the left!"

The man looked at him, then at me. I turned cold. "Now he'll hand us over to the commandant's."

"It's three hundred miles to Moscow, my lads."

"Please, mister, we only want to know-is it on the right or on the left?"

The coupler laughed.

"On the left."

"Thank you. Come along to the left, Sanya!"

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

TO STRIVE. TO SEEK, TO FIND AND NOT TO YIELD

All journeys are much alike when the travellers are eleven or twelve years old, when they travel under the carriages and do not wash for months. You only have to scan a few books dealing with the life of waifs to see this for yourself. That is why I am not going to describe our journey from our town of Ensk to Moscow.

Aunt Dasha's commandments were soon forgotten. We swore, fought and smoked (sometimes dried dung, to keep warm); sometimes it was an aunt travelling to Orenburg for salt who had lost us on the way; at other times we were refugees who were going to join our grandma in Moscow. We gave ourselves out to be brothers—this made a touching impression. As we couldn't sing, I recited on the trains the letter from the navigating officer. I remember how, at Vyshny Volochok station, a young-looking though grey-haired naval man made me repeat the letter twice.

"Very strange," he said, looking at me closely with his stern grey eyes. "Lieutenant Sedov's expedition? Very strange."

We were not waifs, though. Like Captain Hatteras (Pyotr told me about him with a wealth of detail which Jules Verne himself had never suspected), we were going forward, forever forward. Not only because in Turkestan there was bread, while here there were none. We were going out to discover a new land of sunny cities and rich orchards. We had sworn an oath to each other.

What a help that oath was to us!

Once at Staraya Russa we strayed from the road and lost our way in the forest. I lay down in the snow and closed my eyes. Pyotr tried to scare me with talk about wolves, he swore and even hit me, but all in vain. I couldn't take another step. So then he took off his cap and flung it down in the snow.

"You swore an oath, Sanya," he said, "to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield. D'you mean to say you've sworn falsely? Didn't you say yourself-no mercy for whoever breaks the oath?"

I started to cry, but I got up. Late that night we arrived at a village. It was a village of Old Believers, but one old woman nevertheless took us in, fed us and even washed us in the bathhouse.

And so, passing from village to village, from station to station, we at last reached Moscow.

On the way we had sold or bartered for food nearly everything that we had brought with us. Even Pyotr's knife and its sheath, I remember, was sold for two pieces of meat-jelly.

The only things that remained unsold were the papers with the oath written on them in blood "P.S." and "A.G." and the address of Pyotr's uncle.

That uncle! How often we had talked about him! In the end I -came to see him as a sort of Grand Patriarch of Steam Engines-beard streaming in the wind, funnel belching smoke, boiler ejecting steam...

And then, at last, Moscow! One frosty February night we clambered out through the window of the lavatory in which we had been travelling during the last stage of our journey, and jumped down on to the track. We couldn't see Moscow, it was hidden in the dark, and besides, we weren't interested in it. This was just Moscow, whereas that Uncle lived at Moscow Freight Yard, Depot 7, Repair Shop. For two hours we blundered amidst the maze of diverging tracks. Day began to break by the time we reached Depot 7, a bleak building with dark oval windows and a tall oval door on which hung a padlock. The uncle wasn't there. And there wasn't anybody you could ask about him. Later in the morning we learned at the Depot Committee that Uncle had gone off to the front.

So that was that! We went out and sat down on the platform.. It was goodbye to the streets where oranges grew, goodbye to the nights under the open sky, goodbye to the knife under the girdle and the curved sword ornamented in silver!

Just to make sure, Pyotr went back to the committee to ask whether his uncle was married. No, Uncle was a single man. He lived, it transpired, in a railway truck and had gone off to the front in the same truck.

It was quite light by this time and we could now see Moscow-houses upon houses (they all looked like railway stations to me), great heaps of snow, an occasional tramcar, then again houses and houses.

What was to be done! The weeks that followed were about the toughest we had known. The things we did for a living! We took up queues for people. We did jobs for ex-bourgeois, shovelling snow off the pavements in front of the houses when "compulsory labour service" was introduced. We cleaned the stables at the circus. We slept on landings, in cemeteries and in attics.

Then, suddenly, everything changed.

We were walking, I remember, down Bozhedomka Street, yearning only for one thing—to come across a bonfire somewhere; in those days bonfires were sometimes lighted in the centre of the city. But there was nothing doing. Snow, darkness, silence! It was a cold night. All house entrances were locked. We walked along in silence, shivering. It looked as if Pyotr would have to fling his cap down again, but at that very moment, tipsy voices reached us from one of the gateways we had just passed. Pyotr went into the yard. I sat on a curb stone, my teeth chattering with cold and my freezing fingers thrust into my mouth. Pyotr came back.

"Come on!" he said joyfully. "They'll let us in!"

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

MY FIRST FLIGHT

It's good to sleep when you have a roof over your head! It's good, in a bitter frost, to sit around an iron stove, chopping and feeding bits of wood into it, until the tin smoke pipes begin to roar! But better still, while weighing out salt and flour, is it to think that Turkestan itself had been promised us in return for our work. We had stumbled upon a den of black-marketeering war cripples. Their boss, a lame Pole with a scalded face, promised to take us with him to Turkestan. We learned that it was not a city, but a country, whose capital was Tashkent, that same Tashkent to which our cripples used to go every two or three weeks.

Those crooks employed us to pack food products. We got no wages, only board and lodging. But we were glad to have that.

But for the boss's wife, life wouldn't have been at all bad. But the woman got on our nerves.

Fat, with bulging eyes, her belly shaking, she would come running into the shed where we were packaging the food to see whether everything was safe.

"Pfef A pfef Jak smiesz tak robic?" "How dare you work like this?"

I don't know about *robic,* but it was a sore temptation while weighing out salted pork fat not to nip off at least a tiny bit for yourself. Lump sugar just got itself stuck into your sleeve or pocket. But we put up with her. Had we known that we should no more see Turkestan than our own ears, that old hag might have really found herself short of quite a few things.

One day, when we had been working for over two months with this gang, she came rushing into the shed clad only in a dressing gown. In her hand was the padlock with which she locked up the shed at night. Eyes popping, she stopped in the doorway, looked over the shoulder and went very pale.

"No knocking, no banging," she whispered, clutching her head. "No shouting! Keep quiet!"

Before we knew where we were, she shot home to bolt, breathing heavily, then hung up the padlock and went away.

It was so unexpected that for a minute or so we really kept quiet. Then Pyotr swore and lay down on the floor. I followed suit, and we both put an eye to the crack under the door to see what was going on.

At first all was quiet—the empty yard, the thawing snow with yellow footprints filled with water. Then there appeared strange legs in a pair of black high boots: after that another pair of legs, then a third. The legs were making for the annex across the yard. Two pairs disappeared, the third remaining on the doorstep. The butt of a rifle came to rest beside them.

"A round-up," Pyotr whispered and sprang to his feet.

In the dark he bumped his head against mine and I bit my tongue. But this was no time to think of bitten tongues.

"We must run for it!"

Who knows—my life might have taken quite a different turn if we had taken some rope with us. There was plenty of rope in the shed. But we

didn't think of it until we were up in the loft. The shed was brick-built, with a loft, a lean-to roof, and a round opening in the rear wall which gave on to the yard next door.

Pyotr poked his head through this opening and took a look round. He had scratched a cheek when we had removed a plank from the ceiling in the darkness, and now he kept wiping the blood away with his fist every minute.

"Let's jump, eh?"

But it was no easy thing, jumping through a small opening in a sheer wall from a height of fifteen or eighteen feet, unless you took a dive, head foremost. You had to crawl through this opening feet foremost, sitting bent up almost double, then push free from the wall and drop to the ground. That's what Pyotr did. I had half a mind to go back for some rope, when he was already sitting in the hole. He couldn't turn round. He just said, "Come on, Sanya. Don't be afraid." And he was gone. I looked out, my heart in my mouth. He was all right. He had dropped on to a heap of wet snow on the other side of the fence, which at this point came close up to our shed.

"Come on!"

I crawled out and sat down, knees drawn up to my chin. I could now see the whole of the next-door yard. A little girl there was playing with a hand sled outside an old house with columns, and a crow was sitting on a drainpipe. The girl stopped and looked at us with curiosity. The crow glanced at us incuriously, then turned away and drew its head between its wings.

"Come on!"

Besides the girl and the crow, there was a man in the yard, a man in a leather overcoat. He was standing at the point where our annex adjoined the next yard. I saw him finish his cigarette, throw away the fag end and coolly walk towards us.

"Come on!" Pyotr cried desperately.

As I started feebly to push off from the wall with my hands everything suddenly came into motion. The crow took wing, the girl backed away in fright. Pyotr made a dash for the gateway, and the leathered man gave chase. At that moment I understood everything. But it was too late—I was hurtling down.

Such was my first flight—down in a straight line from a height of fifteen feet, without a parachute; I shouldn't call it a successful flight. I struck the fence with my chest, jumped up and fell again. The last thing I saw was Pyotr dashing out into the street and slamming the gate in the face of the man in the leather coat.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

CLAY MODELLING

It was very silly, of course, to run away when you hadn't done anything wrong. After all, we weren't blackmarketeers, we had been only working for them. Our captors wouldn't do anything to us, they'd simply question us and let us go. But it was too late now for regrets. The

man in the leather coat gripped my arm and marched me off—to jail probably. I had been caught, while Pyotr had got away. I was alone now. It was already evening, the sun was going down, and the daws were circling slowly over the trees along the Strastnoi Boulevard. I wasn't crying, but I must have looked pretty miserable, because the man in the leather coat looked at me closely and let go of my arm. He realised that I wouldn't run away.

He brought me into a large well-lighted room on the fifth floor of a huge building at Nikitsky Gate. It was a children's reception centre of the Education Department, where I was to spend three memorable days.

My heart sank when I saw all those ugly customers. Some were playing cards, squatting around a clay-built stove, some were taking down the wooden valance rods from the high windows and feeding them straight into the stove, while others were sleeping or building a house out of old frames and canvases stacked haphazardly in a corner. At night, when it got colder inside the reception centre than outside, these house owners lighted a primus-stove and exacted payment for admission into their house at the rate of a couple of cigarettes or a piece of bread. And gazing incuriously with the sightless white eyes upon all this chaos there stood on tall pedestals plaster figures of Hercules, of Apollo, Diana and other Greek gods.

The only human faces there were those of the gods. Waking up from the cold towards morning with chattering teeth, I glanced at them fearfully. They were probably thinking: "You poor mutt, you! What made you run away from home? That orphanage? You'd be back in the spring and find some job helping the old folks. And now what? Now you're all alone. If you die no one will remember you. Only Pyotr will be running around Moscow, looking for you, and Aunt Dasha will heave a sigh. Ask for some clothes, my lad, and hotfoot it home!" They changed your clothes at the Education Department, they burned your old ones and gave you trousers and a shirt instead. Many waifs deliberately let themselves be rounded up in order to change their ragged clothes.

All those three days I kept silent. For a boy who had only recently learned to speak that was not at all difficult. Who was there to talk to anyway! Every time they brought in a new batch of waifs I caught myself looking to see if Pyotr was among them. But he wasn't, and that was just as well. I sat apart and kept silent.

What with hunger, cold and misery, I started modelling. There were lots of white sculptor's clay in this former art studio. I picked up a lump, soaked it in hot water and started to knead it between my fingers. Almost without realising what I was doing, I had made a toad. I gave it big nostrils and goggle-eyes, then tried my hand on a hare. It was all pretty poor, of course. But at the sight of the familiar features of Frisky emerging from the shapeless lump of clay something stirred within me. I was to remember that moment. Nobody had seen me modelling: an old thief, who had by some miracle landed in the reception centre for homeless children, was describing how they worked at the railway stations in "two-men teams". I stood apart by the window, holding my breath as I gazed at the little lump of clay with long ears sticking out of it, and I couldn't make out why it stirred me so.

After that I modelled a horse with a thick-combed mane. Then it struck me—why, old Skovorodnikov's horses—that's what it was! The figures he used to carve out of wood!

I don't know why, but the discovery bucked me up. I fell asleep in a cheerful mood. I had a feeling as though these figurines were going to be my salvation. They would enable me to get out of this place, help me to find Pyotr, help me to return home and him to reach Turkestan. They would help my sister at the orphanage, Pyotr's uncle at the front, and everybody who roamed the streets at night in cold and hungry Moscow. That's how I prayed-not to God, no! to the toad, the horse and the hare, which were drying on the window-sill, covered with scraps of newspaper.

I daresay some other boy in my place would have become an idol worshipper and I have had everlasting faith in the toad, the horse and the hare. Because they did help me!

The next day a commission from the Education Department came to the reception centre and that place was done away with from now on and for aye. The thieves were packed off to jail, the waifs to orphanages, and the beggars to their homes. All that remained in the spacious art studio were the Greek gods Apollo and Diana and Hercules.

"What's this?" said one of the commission members, a tousled unshaven youth, whom everybody called simply Alee. "Ivan Andreyevich, look at this sculpture!"

Ivan Andreyevich, no less unkempt and unshaven, but older put on his pince-nez and studied the figures.

"Typical Russian figure work from Sergiev Posad," he said. "Interesting. Who did this? You?"

"Yes."

"What's your name?"

"Alexander Grigoriev."

"Would you like to study?"

I looked at him and said nothing. I must have had a pretty rough time of it during those months of hungry street life, because all of a sudden my face twisted and the floodgates opened everywhere— from eyes to nose.

"He'd like to," said commissioner Alee. "Where shall we send him, Ivan Andreyevich?"

"To Nikolai Antonich's, I think," the other answered, carefully replacing my hare on the window-sill.

"Why, of course! Nikolai Antonich has just that bent in art. Well, Alexander Grigoriev, do you want to go to Nikolai Antonich's?"

"He doesn't know him, Alee. Better write it down. Alexander Grigoriev... How old are you?"

"Eleven."

I had added six months to my age.

"Eleven. Have you put that down? To Tatarinov, Commune School No. 4."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

NIKOLAI ANTONICH

The fat girl from the Education Department, who somehow resembled Aunt Dasha, left me in a long dimly-lit corridor of a room, saying that

she would soon be back. It was in the cloakroom. Empty racks, looking like skinny people with horns, stood in open cupboards. All along the wall—doors and doors. One of them was of glass. I saw myself in it for the first time since I had left home. What a sight! A pale-faced boy with a round cropped head looked at me despondently; he was very small, smaller than I thought. A peaked nose, down-drawn mouth.

The fat girl returned and we went to see Nikolai Antonich. He was a stout pale man with scant hair combed back over his balding head. A gold tooth gleamed in his mouth, and I, in my usual stupid way, stared at that tooth and could not keep my eyes off it.

Nikolai Antonich was talking to a group of boys of about sixteen who crowded round him arguing and interrupting each other. He heard them out, twiddling his stubby fingers, which reminded me of hairy caterpillars-cabbage-worms I believe they're called. He was unhurried, condescending, dignified.

We came forward.

"A waif?"

"No."

"From the Education Department," the fat girl explained and placed a paper on the desk.

"Where do you come from, Grigoriev?" Nikolai Antonich demanded after reading the paper.

I told him.

"And what are you doing here, in Moscow?"

"Passing through," I said.

"Oh, I see. Where were you going?"

I took a deep breath and said nothing. I had been asked all these questions a hundred times.

"All right, we'll discuss that some other time," Nikolai Antonich said. He wrote something on the back of the paper. "You won't run away, will you?"

I was quite sure that I would, but to be on the safe side I said, "No."

We went out. In the doorway I looked back. Nikolai Antonich was gazing after me with a thoughtful air. What was he thinking? One thing he was definitely not thinking was that Fate itself had appeared to him that day in the shape of a half-starved ragamuffin in outsize boots and regulation jacket from which protruded a skinny neck.

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PART TWO

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

CHAPTER ONE

I LISTEN TO FAIRY-TALES

"I'll stick it till the first warm day," I had firmly decided. As soon as the frosts let go, it was goodbye for me at the children's home. They'd never see me again. But things worked out differently. I didn't run away at all. What kept me there were the reading sessions.

First thing in the morning we went to the bakery for bread, then lessons began. We were counted as Form I, though some of us were old enough to be studying in Form 6.

Our teacher was an old lady by the name of Serafima Petrovna, who came to school with a rucksack on her back. I really couldn't say what she taught us exactly.

I remember the Duck lesson. It was three lessons in one—geography, nature study and Russian. At the nature study lesson we studied the duck as such: what sort of wings it had, what sort of feet, how it swam, and so on. At the geography lesson the same duck was studied as a denizen of the Earth: you had to point out on the map where it lived and where it didn't. At the Russian lesson Serafima Petrovna taught us to write "d-u-c-k" and read to us something from Brehm about ducks. She mentioned, in passing, that the German for duck was so-and-so, and the French so-and-so. This, I believe, was called at the time the "complex method". It was all sort of "incidental". It is quite likely that Serafima Petrovna got this method mixed up a bit. She was an old lady and wore a mother-of-pearl watch pinned to her breast, so that in answering her we always looked to see what time it was.

In the evening she read to us. It was from her that I first heard the fairy-tale about Sister Alyonushka and Brother Ivanushka.

Sister, dear sister, Swim out, swim out to me. Fires are burning high, Pots are boiling, Knives are ringing, And I am going to die.

All Baba and the Forty Thieves made a particularly strong impression upon me. "Open Sesame!" It grieved me to learn, years later, upon reading the *Thousand and One Nights* in a new translation, that the word should be Simsim and not Sesame, which was a plant, something like hemp. Sesame had magic, it was a wonder-working word. I was terribly disappointed to learn that it was just ordinary hemp.

Without exaggeration it can be said that these tales simply knocked me flat. More than anything else in the world now I wanted to learn to read, like Serafima Petrovna.

On the whole, I liked the life in the children's home. It was snug and warm there, and they fed and taught you in the bargain. It wasn't dull, at least not very. The other boys treated me well—probably because I was a small chap.

At the very outset I made friends with two boys and we did not waste a minute of our spare time.

One of my new chums was Romashov whom we nicknamed Romashka which means "a daisy". He was a skinny lad with a big head on which grew yellow matted hair. He had a flattened nose, unnaturally round eyes and a square chin—altogether a wicked-looking piece of work for a face. We became friends over some picture puzzles. I was good at guessing them and this won his admiration.

The other one was Valya Zhukov, a lazy boy with a head full of plans. At one moment he was all for getting a job at the Zoo, learning to tame lions, the next he was raving to join the fire brigade. After a visit to the bakery he wanted to become a baker; he would come away from the theatre with the firm intention of becoming an actor. Valya was fond of dogs. All the dogs in the neighbourhood treated him with great respect.

But all the same, Valya was just Valya, and Romashka was just Romashka. Neither of them came anywhere near Pyotr.

I can't describe how I missed him.

I went round all the places we had roamed together, inquired about him from all the street waifs and strays, and hung round the reception centres and children's homes. He was nowhere to be found. Had he gone to Turkestan, travelling in some box under an International Sleeping Car, I wondered. Or had he returned home on foot from hungry Moscow? Who could say?

It was then, during my daily wanderings, that I came to know Moscow and to love it. It was mysterious, vast, snowed-up, preoccupied with hunger and war. Maps were hung up in public places, and the red thread held by little flags passed somewhere between Kursk and Kharkov and was nearing Moscow. Okhotny Ryad, the old shopping centre, was a long, low row of painted wooden stalls and shops. Futurist artists had daubed strange pictures on its walls-people with green faces, churches with falling cupolas. Similar pictures decorated the tall fence on Tverskaya. ROSTA placards (Caricatures, often with verse, put on the walls in the street for propaganda purposes in the '20s.) hung in the shop windows, saying:

Munch your pineapples,
Chew your grouse,
Your last day is coming, Bourgeois louse!

These were the first verses I learned to read by myself.

CHAPTER TWO

SCHOOL

I believe I have already mentioned that the Education Department regarded our children's home as a sort of hatchery for budding talent. The Department considered that we were distinguished by having gifts for music, painting or literature. Therefore, after lessons we were allowed to do as we pleased. We were supposed to be freely developing our talents. And so we were. Some of us ran down to the Moskva River to help the firemen catch fish in the ice-holes, while others loitered about the Sukharevka Market, helping themselves to anything that lay in temptation's way.

I spent most of my time indoors, however. We lived on the floor below the school rooms and all school life passed before my eyes. It was an odd, puzzling, complex life. I hung around groups of senior pupils, giving an ear to their conversation. New attitudes, new ideas, new people. All this was as unlike life in Ensk, my home town, as Ensk was unlike Moscow. For a long time it all baffled me and kept me wondering.

One day I happened upon a meeting of fifth-formers, who were discussing the question of whether or not to study. One scruffy-looking schoolboy, who was greeted with cries of "Go it, Shrimpy!", argued that on no account should they be forced to study. Attendance at school should be voluntary, and marks given only by a majority vote.

"Bravo, Shrimpy!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Generally speaking, comrades, it's just a question of teaching staff. Now take those teachers whose lessons are attended by an absolute minority. I suggest that we set them a limit of five pupils. If less than five come to the lesson, the teacher should get no rations that day."

"Hear, hear!"

"Sap!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Bravo!"

Evidently they had in mind not all the teachers, but only one of them, because they all suddenly turned their heads, whispering and nudging one another, at the sight of a tall man with walrus moustache who appeared in the doorway, and stood with folded arms, listening attentively to the speaker.

"Who's that?" I asked Varya, a fat girl with thick plaits.

"That's Whiskers, my boy," Varya answered.

"What do you mean, whiskers?"

"Fancy not knowing that!"

I was soon to discover who it was that everyone in School 4 called "Whiskers".

He was the geography teacher, Korablev, whom the whole school heartily disliked. For one thing, the consensus of opinion was that he was a fool and an ignorant one at that. Secondly, he turned up for his lesson every blessed day and sat it out, even though there might be only three pupils in his class. This simply got everyone's goat.

I looked at Korablev. I must have been staring, because all of a sudden he stared back at me, ever so faintly aping my goggled look. I even fancied that he smiled into his moustache. But Shrimpy was holding forth again, and Korablev, turning his twinkling eye away from me, listened to him with close attention.

CHAPTER THREE

THE OLD LADY FROM ENSK

I remember that day distinctly—a sunny day, with spring rain that kept coming and going-the day I met the thin old lady in the green velvet coat in Kudrinskaya Square. She was carrying a shopping bag full of all kinds of things-potatoes, sorrel leaves, onions-and in her other hand a big umbrella. Though she obviously found the bag heavy, she walked along briskly with an air of preoccupation, and I could hear her counting to herself in a whisper: "Mushrooms-half a pound-five hundred rubles; washing blue-a hundred and fifty; beetroot-a hundred and fifty; milk-a pint-a hundred and fifty; prayer for the dead-seven hundred and sixty rubles; three eggs-three hundred rubles; confession—five hundred rubles." Prices were like that in those days.

Finally, she drew a light sigh and put the bag down on a dry stone to recover her breath.

"Let me help you, Grandma," I said.

"Go away, you rascal! I know your kind!"

She shook a threatening finger at me and picked up her bag.

I walked on. But we were both going in the same direction and presently drew level with each other again. The old lady was obviously anxious to get rid of me, but her burden made it difficult for her to get away.

"Look here. Grandma, if you think I'm going to steal anything, then I'll help you for nothing," I said. "Cross my heart I will, I just can't see you dragging that load."

The old lady got angry. She clutched her bag to her with one arm and began to wave her umbrella at me with the other as though fighting off a bee.

"Get along with you! I've had three lemons* stolen already. I know you."

"Just as you like. It was the street boys who stole them from you, but I'm from a children's home."

"You're just as bad a lot as the others."

She looked at me and I at her. Her nose was slightly tilted and had a purposeful look about it. She seemed a kind old soul. Maybe she took a fancy to me too, because she suddenly stopped brandishing her umbrella and demanded: "Who are your parents?"

"I haven't any."

"Where d'you come from? Moscow?"

I realised at once that if I said I was a Muscovite, she would chase me away. She probably thought it was Moscow boys who had stolen her money.

"No," I said, "I'm from Ensk."

Would you believe it, she was from Ensk too! Her eyes lit up and her face grew kinder still.

"You're fibbing, you little liar," she said sternly. "The one who stole the lemon from me said he wasn't from Moscow either. If you're from Ensk, where did you live there?"

"On the Peshchinka, back of the Market Square."

"I don't believe you." This without conviction. "Peshchinka, you say? There may be Peshchinkas in other places too. I don't remember you."

"You must have left the town a long time ago, when I was still little."

"It wasn't long ago, it was only recently. Come on, take the bag by one handle, I'll take the other. Don't jerk it."

We carried the bag and chatted. I told her how Pyotr and I had headed for Turkestan and got stranded in Moscow. She listened with interest.

"Hoity-toity! What cleverdicks! Globe-trotters, eh? Of all the crazy ideas!"

As we passed our street I pointed out our school to her.

"We do belong to the same places, I see," the old lady said enigmatically.

She lived in the Second Tverskaya-Yamskaya, in a little brick-built house. I knew it by sight.

"That's where our headmaster lives," I said. "Maybe you know him—Nikolai Antonich."

(*In those days of inflation a million ruble treasury note was popularly called a "lemon". *–Tr.)*.

"Is that so!" the old lady said. "And what's he like? Is he a good Head?"

"Rather!"

I couldn't make out why she laughed. We went upstairs and stopped in front of a door upholstered in clean oilcloth. There was a name on the doorplate written in fanciful lettering which I hadn't time to read.

Whispering to herself, the old woman drew a key from her coat. I turned to go, but she stopped me.

"I did it for nothing. Grandma."

"Then sit with me a bit for nothing."

She tiptoed into the little entrance hall and began to take her coat off without putting on the light. She removed the coat, a tasselled shawl, a sleeveless jacket, then another smaller shawl, a kerchief and so on. Then she opened her umbrella and after that she disappeared. The next moment the kitchen door opened and a little girl appeared in the doorway. I was almost ready to believe that this was my old lady who had magically turned into a little girl. But the next moment the old lady herself reappeared. She stepped out of a cupboard in which she had been hanging up her shawls and things.

"And this is Katerina Ivanovna," she said.

Katerina Ivanovna was about twelve, no older than I. But what a difference! I wish I had the same poise she had, the same proud set of the head, the same way of looking one straight in the face with her dark bright eyes. She was rosy, but demure and had the same purposeful nose as the old lady. All in all, she was pretty, but gave herself airs-you could tell that at once.

"You can congratulate me, Katerina Ivanovna," the old lady said, peeling off more clothes. "They've pinched a lemon again."

"Didn't I tell you to keep your money in your coat pocket," Katerina Ivanovna said with annoyance.

"Coat pocket, you say? That's just where they pinched it from."

"Then you've been counting again. Grandma."

"No I wasn't! I had this young man here escorting me."

The girl looked at me. Till then she hadn't seemed to notice me.

"He carried my bag for me. How's your mother?"

"We're taking her temperature now," the girl said, regarding me coolly.

"Tut, tut!" the old lady said, thrown into a flutter. "Why so late? You know the doctor said she was to have it taken at noon."

She hurried out and the girl and I were left by ourselves. For two minutes or so we said nothing. Then frowning, she asked me gravely:

"Have you read *Helen Robinson'!"*

"No."

"Robinson Crusoe?

"No."

"Why not?"

I was about to tell her that it was only six months since I had learned to read properly, but checked myself in time.

"I haven't got them."

"What form are you in?"

"I'm not in any form."

"He's a traveller," said the old lady, coming back. "Ninety-eight point seven. He was footing it to Turkestan. Treat him nicely, Katya."

"Footing it? What d'you mean?"

"What I say. He hoofed it all the way."

In the hall, under the mirror, stood a little table, and Katya drew a chair up to it, settled herself in it with her head resting on her hand and said, "Well, tell me about it."

I had no desire to tell her anything-she gave herself such airs. If we had made it and got to Turkestan that would be a different matter. I therefore answered politely, "Oh, I don't feel like it. Some other time perhaps."

The old lady put bread and jam in front of me, but I declined it, saying, "I told you I did it for nothing."

I don't know why, but I got upset. I was even pleased that Katya had reddened when I refused to tell her my story and made for the door.

"Come, come, don't be angry," the old lady said as she saw me out. "What's your name?"

"Grigoriev, Alexander."

"Well, Alexander Grigoriev, goodbye, and thank you."

I stood for a while on the landing, trying to make out the name on the doorplate. Kazarinov ... no, it wasn't Kazarinov...

"N. A. Tatarinov," I read it out suddenly.
Gosh! Tatarinov, Nikolai Antonich. Our Head. This was his flat.

CHAPTER FOUR

MORE FOOD FOR THOUGHT

We spent the summer at Silver Woods, just outside Moscow, in an old deserted house which had lots of little passage steps, carved wooden ceilings and corridors that unexpectedly ended in blank walls. The whole place creaked-the doors in one key, the shutters in another. One large room was boarded up, but even in there something creaked and rustled, and suddenly there would come a measured rattling sound like that of a little hammer in a striking clock tapping without striking the bell. In the attic grew puffballs and foreign books lay scattered about with pages torn out of them and covers missing.

Before the Revolution the house had belonged to an old gypsy countess. A gypsy countess! How mysterious! It was rumoured that before she died she had hidden away her valuables. Romashka searched for the treasure all through the summer. Puny, big-headed, he prowled around the house with a stick, tapping and listening. He tapped at night until he got a clip on the ear from one of the older boys. At thirteen he was determined to get rich. Whenever he spoke about money his pale ears would begin to burn. He was a born treasure-seeker—superstitious and greedy.

Lilac grew thickly round the tumbledown arbours. Statues lined the green paths. They were quite unlike those Greek gods. Those had been remote, with white sightless eyes, whereas these were people, just like us.

Life was good only at the beginning of the summer, when we first moved into Silver Woods. Afterwards things got worse. They all but stopped feeding us. Our children's home was put under a system of "self-supply". We caught fish and crabs, we sold lilac at the stadium when anything was on there, and simply helped ourselves to anything we could lay hands on. In the evenings we lit fires in the garden and roasted what we had bagged.

Here is a description of one such evening—they were all much alike.

We are sitting around our fire, tired out, hungry and ill-tempered. Everything is black with smoke-the mess-tin, the sticks from which it hangs, our faces and hands. Like cannibals getting ready to devour Captain Cook, we sit in silence, staring into the fire. The smouldering brands suddenly blaze up and fall apart, and a cap of curling, dark-red smoke, hangs over the fire.

We are a "commune". The whole children's home is divided into communes. Foraging on one's own is a hard job. Each commune has its chairman, its own fire and its own reserve supply—whatever has not been eaten that day and is left over for the next.

Our chairman is Stepka Ivanov, a fifteen-year-old boy with a smooth mug. He is a greedy-guts and bully whom everyone fears.

"What about a game o' knuckles?" Stepka says lazily.

All are silent. No one cares to play knuckles. Stepka is sated, that's why he wants to play.

"All right, Stepka. Only it's dark, you know," says Romashka.

"Know where it's dark? Get up!"

There was nothing our chairman liked more in the world than to play knucklebones. But he cheated and everyone knew it. All except Valya and I sucked up to him, especially Romashka. Romashka even lost to him on purpose so's to keep in with him.

If you think we were roasting some dainty gamebird over our fire you are mistaken. In our mess-tin, seized in battle from the kitchen, we were cooking soup. It is real "soup made from sausage stick", as in the fairy-tale which Serafima Petrovna had read to us during the winter. The difference, if any, is that while that soup had been made from a mouse's tail, ours had any odd thing put into that came to hand, sometimes even frogs' legs.

And yet it wasn't a bad summer. It had stuck in my memory not because we were poorly fed. I was used to that. I don't remember ever having had a decent meal those days. The reason I remember this summer was quite a different one. It was then for the first time that I gained a sense of self-respect.

It happened at the end of August, shortly before we went back to town, and around one of those fires on which we were cooking our supper. Stepka all of a sudden announced a new procedure for eating. Up to now we had eaten from the one pot in turn, spoon by spoon. Stepka started, as chairman, then Romashka, and so on. But now we were to tuck in all together while the soup was still hot, the quickest getting the most.

Nobody liked the new arrangement. No wonder! With a chairman like ours no one stood a chance. He could wolf down the whole pot in no time.

"Nothing doing," Valya said with decision.

This was greeted with a hubbub of approval. Stepka slowly got up, dusted his knees and hit Valya in the face. It was a smashing blow that sent the blood gushing over his face. It must have got into his eyes too, because he started to wave his arms about like a blind man. "Well," Stepka drawled, "anyone else asking for it?"

I was the smallest boy in the commune, and he could have mopped up the floor with me, of course. Nevertheless I hit out at Stepka. All at once he staggered and slumped down. I don't know where I had struck him, but he sat on the ground blinking, wearing a sort of thoughtful expression. The next minute he was up and made a rush at me, but now the other boys took my part. Stepka was thrashed like the cur he was. While he lay by the fire, howling, we hastily elected another chairman—me. Stepka, of course, did not vote. In any case he would have been in a minority of one, because I was elected unanimously.

Oddly enough, this scrap was my first act of social service. I heard the boys say of me: "He's got plenty of guts." I had guts! Now, what sort of person was I? Here was food for thought indeed.

CHAPTER FIVE

IS THERE SALT IN SNOW?

Nothing changed in our school life that year except that I had now become a pupil of Form 3. As usual, Korablev turned up at school at 10 a.m. He would arrive in a long autumn overcoat and a wide-brimmed hat, leisurely comb his moustache in front of the looking-glass and go in to his classroom.

He asked no questions and set no homework. He simply related something or read to us. It turned out that he had been a traveller and had been all over the world. In India he had seen yogi conjurors who had been buried in the ground for a year and then got up as alive and well as anything. In China he had eaten the tastiest of Chinese dishes-rotten eggs. In Persia he had witnessed the sacrificial feats of the Mohammedans.

It was not until several years later that I learned he had never been outside Russia. He had made it all up, but how interestingly! Although, for some reason many had said that he was a fool, none could maintain that he knew nothing.

As before, the chief figure at our school was the Head, Nikolai Antonich. He made all decisions, went into everything, attended all meetings. The senior boys visited him at home to "thrash things out". One day I was lounging about the assembly hall, trying to make up my mind whether to go down to the Moskva River or to Sparrow Hills, when the doors of the teachers' room opened and Nikolai Antonich beckoned to me.

"Grigoriev," he said (he had a reputation for knowing everyone in the school by name). "You know where I live, don't you?"

I said that I did.

"And do you know what a lactometer is?"

I said that I didn't.

"It's an instrument which tells you how much water there is in the milk. As we know," he went on, raising a finger, "the women who sell milk on the market dilute their milk with water. If you put the lactometer in such milk you will see how much milk there is and how much water. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Well, go and fetch it to me."

He wrote a note.

"Mind you don't break it. It's made of glass."

I was to give the note to Nina Kapitonovna. I had no idea that this was the name of the old lady from Ensk. But instead of the old lady, the door was opened by a spare little woman in a black dress.

"What do you want, boy?"

"Nikolai Antonich sent me."

The woman, of course, was Katya's mother and the old lady's daughter. All three had the same purposeful noses, the same dark, lively eyes. But the granddaughter and her grandmother were brighter looking. The daughter had a drooping careworn expression.

"Lactometer?" she said in a puzzled tone, after she had read the note. "Ah, yes!"

She went into the kitchen and returned with the lactometer in her hand. I was disappointed. It was just like a thermometer, only a little bigger.

"Be careful you don't break it."

"Me break it?" I replied with scorn.

I remember distinctly that the daring idea of testing the lactometer for snow salt struck me a minute or two after Katya's mother had shut the door behind me.

I had just reached the bottom of the stairs and stood there gripping the instrument with my hand in my pocket. Pyotr had once said that snow had salt in it. Would the lactometer show that salt or was Pyotr fibbing? That was the question. It needed testing.

I chose a quiet spot behind a shed, next to a refuse dump. A little house was built of bricks in the trodden-down snow, from which a black thread, resting on pegs, ran round the back of the shed- the children had probably been playing a field telephone. I breathed on the lactometer and with a beating heart stuck it into the snow next to the little house. You can judge what a stupid head I was when I tell you that, after a while, I pulled the lactometer out of the snow and finding no change in it, I stuck it back again upside down.

Nearby, I heard someone gasp. I turned round.

"Run! You'll be blown up!" came a shout from inside the shed. . It all happened in a matter of seconds. A girl in an unbuttoned overcoat rushed out of the shed towards me. "Katya," I thought, and reached for the instrument. But Katya grasped my arm and dragged me away. I tried to push her off and we both fell in the snow. Bang! Pieces of brick flew through the air, and powdery snow rose behind us in a white cloud and settled on us.

I had been under fire once before, at my mother's funeral, but this was much more terrifying. Rumblings and explosions still came from the refuse dump, and each time I lifted my head Katya quivered and said, "Smashing, eh?"

At last I sprang to my feet.

"The lactometer!" I yelled and ran like mad towards the dust-heap. "Where is it?"

At the spot where I had stuck it in the snow there was a deep hole.

"It's exploded!"

Katya was still sitting in the snow. Her face was pale and her eyes shone.

"Silly ass, it was firedamp that exploded," she said scornfully. "And now you'd better run for it, because the policeman will soon pop—and he'll nab you. He won't catch me though."

"The lactometer!" I repeated in despair, feeling that my lips were beginning to quiver and my face twitch. "Nikolai Antonich sent me for it. I put it in the snow. Where is it?"

Katya got up. There was a frost in the yard and she was without a hat, her dark hair parted in the middle and one plait stuffed in her mouth. I wasn't looking at her at the time and didn't remember this until afterwards.

"I've saved your life," she said with a little sniff. "You'd have been killed on the spot, hit right in the back. You owe your life to me. What were you doing here around my firedamp anyway?"

I did not answer. I was choking with fury.

"I would have you know, though," she added solemnly, "that even if it had been a cat coming near the gas I should have saved it just the same. Makes no difference to me."

I walked out of the yard in silence. But where was I to go? I couldn't go back to the school-that much was clear.

Katya caught up with me at the gate.

"Hey, you, Nikolai Antonich!" she shouted. "Where are you off to? Going to snitch?"

I went for her. Did I enjoy it! I paid her back for everything-for the ruined lactometer, for the tip-tilted nose, for my not being able to go back to school and for her having saved my life when nobody asked her to.

She gave as good as she got, though. Stepping back, she planted a blow in my stomach. I grabbed her by the plait and poked her nose into the snow. She leapt to her feet.

"That wasn't fair, your backheeling," she said briskly. "If it wasn't for that I'd have laid into you good and proper. I thrash all the boys in our form. What form are you in? Wasn't it you who helped Grandma to carry her bag? You're in the third form, aren't you?"

"Yes," I said drearily.

She looked at me.

"Fancy making all that fuss over a silly thermometer," she said contemptuously. "If you like I'll say it was me who did it. I don't care. Wait a minute."

She ran off and was back in a few minutes wearing a small hat and looking quite different, sort of impressive, and with ribbons in her plaits.

"I told Grandma you'd been here. She's sleeping. She asked why you didn't come in. It's a good thing that lactometer is broken, she says. It was such a nuisance, having to stick it into the milk every time. It didn't show right anyway. It's Nikolai Antonich's idea, but Grandma can always tell whether the milk's good or not by tasting it."

The nearer we got to the school the more pronounced became Katya's gravity of manner. She walked up the stairs, head thrown back, eyes narrowed, with an aloof air.

Nikolai Antonich was in the teachers' room where I had left him.

"Don't say anything, I'll tell him myself," I muttered to Katya.

She gave a contemptuous sniff, one of her plaits arching out from under her hat.

It was this conversation that started off the string of riddles of which I shall write in the next chapter.

The thing was that Nikolai Antonich, that suave Nikolai Antonich with his grand air of patronage, whom we were accustomed to regard as lord and master of School 4-vanished the moment Katya crossed the threshold. In his place was a new Nikolai Antonich, one who smiled unnaturally when he spoke, leaned across the table, opening his eyes wide and raising his eyebrows as though Katya were speaking of God knows what extraordinary things. Was he afraid of her, I wondered?

"Nikolai Antonich, you sent him for the lactometer, didn't you?" Katya said motioning to me with her eyes in an offhand manner.

"I did, Katya."

"Very well. I've broken it."

Nikolai Antonich looked grave.

"She's fibbing, " I said glumly. "It exploded."

"I don't understand. Shut up, Grigoriev! What's it all about, Katya, explain."

"There's nothing to explain," Katya answered with a proud toss of her head. "I broke the lactometer, that's all."

"I see. But I believe I sent this boy for it, didn't I?"

"And he hasn't brought it because I broke it."

"She's fibbing," I repeated.

Katya's eyes snapped at me.

"That's all very well, Katya," Nikolai Antonich said, pursing his lips benignly. "But you see, they've delivered milk to the school and I've put off breakfast in order to test the quality of this milk before deciding whether or not to continue taking it from our present milk women. It seems I have been waiting for nothing. What's more, it appears that a valuable instrument has been broken, and broken in circumstances which are anything but clear. Now you explain, Grigoriev, what it's all about."

"What a frightful bore! I'm going, Nikolai Antonich," Katya announced.

Nikolai Antonich looked at her. Somehow it struck me at that moment that he hated her.

"All right, Katya, run along," he said in a mild tone. "I'll have it out here with this boy."

"In that case I'll wait."

She settled herself in a chair and impatiently chewed the end of her plait while we were talking. I daresay if she had gone away the talk would not have ended so amicably. The lactometer affair was forgiven. Nikolai Antonich even recalled the fact that I had been sent to his school as a sculptor-to-be. Katya listened with interest.

From that day on we became friends. She liked me for not letting her take the blame on herself and not mentioning the firedamp explosion when telling my story.

"You thought I was going to catch it, didn't you?" she said, when we came out of the school.

"Mmm."

"Not likely! Come and see us. Grandma's invited you."

CHAPTER SIX

I GO VISITING

I woke up that morning with the thought: should I go or not? Two things worried me - my trousers, and Nikolai Antonich. The trousers were not exactly picture-look, being neither short nor long, and patched at the knees. As for Nikolai Antonich, he was Head of the school, you will remember, that's to say a rather formidable personage. What if he suddenly started questioning me about this, that and the other? Nevertheless, when lessons were over, I polished my boots, and wetted, brushed and parted my hair. I was going to pay a visit!

How awkward I felt, how shy I was! My confounded hair kept sticking up on the top of my head and I had to keep it down with spit. Nina Kapitonovna was telling Katya and me something, when all of a sudden

she commanded: "Shut your mouth!" I had been staring at her open-mouthed.

Katya showed me round the flat. In one of the rooms she lived herself with her mother, in another Nikolai Antonich, and the third was used as a dining-room. The desk-set in Nikolai Antonich's room represented "a scene from the life of Ilya of Murom", as Katya explained to me. In fact, the inkwell was made in the shape of a bearded head wearing a spiked helmet, the ashtray represented two crossed, ancient Russian gauntlets, and so on. The ink was under the helmet, which meant that Nikolai Antonich had to dip his pen right into the hero's skull. This stuck me as odd.

Between the windows stood a bookcase; I had never seen so many books together. Over the bookcase hung a half-length portrait of a naval officer with a broad brow, a square jaw and dancing grey eyes.

I noticed a similar but smaller portrait in the dining-room and a still smaller one in Katya's room over the bed.

"My Father," Katya explained, glancing at me sideways. And I had been thinking that Nikolai Antonich was her father! On second thoughts, though, she would hardly have called her own father by his name and patronymic. "Stepfather," I thought, but the next moment decided that he couldn't be. I knew what a stepfather was. This did not look like it.

Then Katya showed me a mariner's compass—a very interesting gadget. It was a brass hoop on a stand with a little bowl swinging in it, and in the bowl, under a glass cover, a needle. Whichever way you turned the bowl, even if you held it upside down, the needle would still keep swinging and the anchor at the tip would point North. "Such a compass can stand any gale." "What's it doing here?" "Father gave it to me." "Where is he?"

Katya's face darkened.

"I don't know."

"He divorced her mother and left her," I decided immediately. I had heard of such cases.

I noticed that there was a lot of pictures in the flat, and very good ones, too, I thought. One was really beautiful-it showed a straight wide path in a garden and pine trees lit up by the sun.

"That's a Levitan," Katya said in a casual, grown-up way.

I didn't know at the time that Levitan was the name of the artist, and decided that this must be the name of the place painted in the picture.

Then the old lady called us in to have tea with saccharin.

"So that's the sort you are, Alexander Grigoriev," she said. "You went and broke the lactometer."

She asked me to tell her all about Ensk, even the post-office there. "What about the post-office?" she said. She was rattled because I hadn't heard of some people by the name of Bubenchikov.

"And the orchard by the synagogue! Never heard of it? Tell me another! You must have gone after those apples scores of times."

She heaved a sigh.

"It's a long time since we left Ensk. I didn't want to move, believe me! It was all Nikolai Antonich's doing. He came down. It's no use waiting any longer, he says. We'll leave our address, and if need be they'll find us. We sold all our things, this is all that's left, and came here, to Moscow."

"Grandma!" Katya said sternly.

"What d'you mean-Grandma?"

"At it again?"

"All right. I won't. We're all right here."

I understood nothing—whom they had been waiting for or why it was no use waiting any longer. I did not ask any questions, of course, all the more as Nina Kapitonovna changed the subject herself.

That was how I spent my time at our headmaster's flat in Tverskaya-Yamskaya Street.

When I was leaving Katya gave me the book *Helen Robinson* against my word of honour that I would not bend back the covers or dirty the pages.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE TATARINOVS

The Tatarinovs had no domestic help, and Nina Kapitonovna had a pretty hard time of it considering her age. I helped her. Together we kindled the stove, chopped firewood, and even washed up. I found it interesting there. The flat was a sort of Ali Baba's cave to me, what with its treasures, perils and riddles. The old lady was the treasure, and Maria Vasilievna the riddle, while Nikolai Antonich stood for things perilous and disagreeable.

Maria Vasilievna was a widow—or maybe she wasn't, because one day I heard Nina Kapitonovna say of her with a sigh: "Neither widowed nor married." The odd thing about it was that she grieved so much for her husband. She always went about in a black dress, like a nun. She was studying at a medical institute. I thought it rather strange at the time that a mother should be studying. All of a sudden she would stop talking and going anywhere, either to her institute or to work (she was also working), but would sit with her feet up on the couch and smoke. Katya would then say: "Mummy's pining," and everybody would be short-tempered and gloomy.

Nikolai Antonich, as I soon learnt, was not her husband at all, and was unmarried for all that he was forty-five. "What is he to you?" I once asked Katya. "Nothing."

She was fibbing, of course, for she and her mother bore the same surname as Nikolai Antonich. He was Katya's uncle, or rather a cousin once removed. He was a relative, yet they weren't very nice to him. That, too, struck me as odd, especially since he, on the contrary, was very obliging to everybody, too much so in fact.

The old lady was fond of the movies and did not miss a single picture, and Nikolai Antonich used to go with her, even booking the tickets in advance. Over the supper she would start telling enthusiastically what the film was about (at such times, by the way, she strongly resembled Katya), while Nikolai Antonich patiently listened, though he had just returned from the cinema with her.

Yet she seemed to feel sorry for him. I saw him once playing patience, his head bent low, lingers drumming on the table, and caught her looking at him with compassion.

If anyone treated him cruelly, it was Maria Vasilievna. What he did not do for her! He brought her tickets for the theatre, staying at home himself. He gave her flowers. I heard him begging her to take care of herself and give up her job. He was no less attentive to her visitors. The moment anyone came to see her, he would be there on the spot. Very genial, he would engage the guest in conversation, while Maria Vasilievna sat on the couch, smoking and brooding.

He was his most amiable when Korablev called. He obviously looked at Whiskers as his own guest, for he would drag him off at once to his own room or into the dining-room and not allow him to talk shop. Generally, everybody brightened up when Korablev came, especially Maria Vasilievna. Wearing a new dress with a white collar, she would lay the table herself and do the honours, looking more beautiful than ever. She would even laugh sometimes when Korablev, after combing his moustache before the mirror, began paying noisy court to the old lady. Nikolai Antonich laughed too .and paled. It was an odd trait of his-he always turned pale when he laughed.

He did not like me. For a long time I never suspected it. At first he merely showed surprise at seeing me, then he started to make a wry face and became sort of sniffy. Then he started lecturing:

"Is that the way to say 'thank you'?" He had heard me thank the old lady for something. "Do you know what 'thank you' means? Bear in mind that the course your whole life will take depends upon whether you know this or not, whether you understand it or not. We live in human society, and one of the motive forces of that society is the sense of gratitude. Perhaps you have heard that I once had a cousin. Repeatedly, throughout his life, I rendered him material as well as moral assistance. He turned out to be ungrateful. And the result? It disastrously affected his whole life."

Listening to him somehow made me aware of the patches on my trousers. Yes, I wore broken-down boots, I was small, grubby and far too pale. I was one thing and they, the Tatarinovs, quite another. They were rich and I was poor. They were clever and learned people, and I was a fool. Here indeed was something to think about!

I was not the only one to whom Nikolai Antonich held forth about his cousin. It was his pet subject. He claimed that he had cared for him all his life, ever since he was a child at Genichesk, on the shores of the Sea of Azov. His cousin came from a poor fisherman's family, and but for Nikolai Antonich, would have remained a fisherman, like his father, his grandfather and seven generations of his forefathers. Nikolai Antonich, "having noticed in the boy remarkable talents and a penchant for reading", had taken him to Rostov-on-Don and pulled strings to get his cousin enrolled in a nautical school. During the winter he paid him a "monthly allowance", and in the summer he got him a job as seaman in vessels plying between Batum and Novorossiisk. He was instrumental in getting his brother a billet in the navy, where he passed his exam as naval ensign. With great difficulty, Nikolai Antonich got permission for him to take his exams for a course at Naval College and afterwards assisted him financially when, on graduation, he had to get himself a new uniform. In short, he had done a great deal for his cousin, which explained why he was so fond of talking about him. He spoke slowly,

going into great detail, and the women listened to him with something akin to awed reverence.

I don't know why, but it seemed to me that at those moments they felt indebted to him, deeply indebted for all that he had done for his cousin. As a matter of fact they did owe him an unpayable debt, because that cousin, whom Nikolai Antonich alternately referred to as "my poor" or "missing" cousin, was Maria Vasilievna's husband, consequently Katya's father.

Everything in the flat used to belong to him and now belonged to Maria Vasilievna and Katya. The pictures, too, for which, according to the old lady, "the Tretyakov Gallery was offering big money", and some "insurance policy" or other for which eight thousand rubles was payable at a Paris bank.

The one person least interested in all these intricate affairs and relationships among the grown-ups was Katya. She had more important things to attend to. She carried on a correspondence with two girl friends in Ensk, and had a habit of leaving these letters lying about everywhere, so that anyone who felt like it, even visitors, could read them. She wrote her friends exactly what they wrote her. One friend, say, would write that she had dreamt of having lost her handbag, when all of a sudden Misha Kuptsov— "you remember me writing about him"—came towards her with the bag in his hand. And Katya would reply to her friend that she dreamt she had lost, not a handbag, but a penholder or a ribbon, and that Shura Golubentsev - "you remember me writing about him"-had found it and brought it to her. Her friend would write that she had been to the cinema, and Katya would reply that so had she, though in fact she had stayed indoors. Later it occurred to me that her friends were older than her and she was copying them.

Her classmates, however, she treated rather high-handedly. There was one little girl by the name of Kiren-at least that was what the Tatarinovs called her—whom she ordered about more than anybody else. Katya got cross because Kiren was not fond of reading. "Have you read *Dubrovsky,* Kiren?" "Yes." "Don't tell lies." "Spit in my eye."
"Then why didn't Masha marry Dubrovsky - tell me that." "She did." "Fiddlesticks!" "But I read that she did marry him."

Katya tried the same thing on me when I returned *Helen Robinson,* but there was nothing doing. I could go on reciting word for word from any point. She did not like to show surprise and merely said:
"Learned it off by heart, like a parrot."

I daresay she considered herself as good as Helen Robinson and was sure that in a similar desperate plight she would have been just as brave. If you ask me, though, a person who was preparing herself for such an extraordinary destiny ought not to have spent so much time in front of the mirror, especially considering that no mirrors are to be found on desert islands. And Katya did stand a lot in front of mirrors.

The winter I started visiting the Tatarinovs Katya's latest fad was explosions. Her fingers were always burnt black and she had a smell of percussion cap and gunpowder about her, like Pyotr once had. Potassium chlorate lay in the folds of the books she gave me. Then the explosions stopped abruptly. Katya had settled down to read *The Century of Discovery*.
This was an excellent book which gave the life-stories of Christopher Columbus, Hernan Cortes and other famous seafarers and conquerors

of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Amerigo Vespucci, after whom America is named, was pictured in front of a globe, with a pair of compasses, which he held over an open book-a bearded, jolly-looking man. Vasco Nunez de Balboa, armour-clad, with plumed helmet, was knee-deep in the water. He looked to me like some Russian Vaska who had turned up in the Pacific. I was keen on the book too. But Katya! She was simply mad on it. She mooned about like one in a dream, only awakening to impart the information that "Cortes, accompanied by the good wishes of the Tiascalans, set out on his expedition and within a few days reached the populous capital city of the Incas."

The cat, who before *The Century of Discovery* was called simply Vasena, she renamed Ixtacihuatl - it appears that there is a mountain by the name in Mexico. She tried Popocatepetl - the name of another mountain-on Nina Kapitonovna, but it wouldn't work. The old lady refused to answer to any name but "Grandma".

In short, if there was anything that Katya regretted at all seriously, it was that she had not conquered Mexico and discovered Peru.

But there was more to this, as the future showed. I knew what she was dreaming about. She wanted to become a ship's captain.

CHAPTER EIGHT

KORABLEV PROPOSES

Now what but good, one would think, could I expect from this acquaintance? Yet in a little less than six months I was kicked out.

It was a Sunday and the Tatarinovs were expecting visitors. Katya was drawing a picture of "the Spaniards' first encounter with the Indians" from *The Century of Discovery,* and Nina Kapitonovna drafted me into the kitchen. She was rather excited and kept listening and saying to me: "Sh-sh, there goes the bell."

"It's out in the street, Nina Kapitonovna."

But she kept listening.

In the end, she went out into the dining-room and missed the bell when it did ring. I opened the door. Korablev came in wearing a light overcoat and a light-coloured hat. I had never seen him looking so smart.

His voice shook slightly as he inquired whether Maria Vasilievna was at home. I said she was. But he stood there for several more seconds without taking his things off. Then he went in to Maria Vasilievna and I saw Nina Kapitonovna tiptoeing back from the dining-room. Why the tiptoes and that excited mysterious air?

From that moment on everything started to go wrong with us. Nina Kapitonovna, who was peeling potatoes, found the knife slipping from her fingers. She kept running out into the dining-room, as though to fetch something, but returned empty-handed. At first she returned in silence, making sundry mysterious signs with her hands, which could be interpreted roughly as: "Goodness gracious, what's going to happen?"

Then she started muttering. After that she sighed and broke the news. And amazing news it was! Korablev had come to propose to Maria Vasilievna. I knew, of course, what "propose" meant. He wanted to marry her and had come to ask whether or not she would have him.

Would she accept or would she not? If I had not been in the kitchen Nina Kapitonovna would have debated this point with her pots and pans. She could not keep silent.

"He says, I'll give my all, my whole life," she reported on her third or fourth trip to the dining-room. "I'll live for you."

"Is that so?" I threw in.

"I'll live for you," Nina Kapitonovna solemnly repeated. "I see the life you lead. It's unenviable, I can't bear to see it."

She started on the potatoes, but soon went out again and returned with moist eyes.

"He's always yearned for a family, he says. I was a lonely man, and I need nobody but you, he says. I've been sharing your grief for a long time. Something like that."

The "something like that" was Nina Kapitonovna's own contribution. Ten minutes later she went out again and came back looking puzzled.

"I'm tired of these people," she said blinking. "They don't let me get on with my work. You know who I mean. Believe me, he's a terrible man."

She sighed and sat down.

"No, she won't marry him. She's heartbroken and he's getting on in years."

For nothing better to say, I could only repeat: "Is that so?"

"Believe me, he's a terrible man," Nina Kapitonovna repeated thoughtfully. "Maybe! Good Lord! Maybe!"

I sat as quiet as a mouse. The dinner was forgotten. White beads of water rolled over the stove as the water in which the potatoes were swimming kept boiling and boiling.

The old lady went out again and this time spent some fifteen minutes in the dining-room. She came back frowning and threw up her hands.

"She's turned him down!" she announced. "Rejected him. My God! Such a man!"

I don't think she quite knew herself whether to be glad or disappointed that Maria Vasilievna had refused Korablev.

"It's a pity," I said.

She looked at me in astonishment.

"She could marry," I added. "She's still young."

"Stuff and nonsense!" Nina Kapitonovna began angrily. Then suddenly becoming sedate and dignified, she sailed out of the kitchen and met Korablev in the hall. He was very pale. Maria Vasilievna stood in the doorway silently watching him as he put on his coat. Her eyes showed that she had recently been crying.

"Poor man, poor man!" Nina Kapitonovna said as though to herself. Korablev kissed her hand and she kissed him on the forehead, for which she had to stand on tiptoe and he had to bend down.

"Ivan Pavlovich, you are my friend and our friend," Nina Kapitonovna said gravely. "I want you to know that this house is like your own home. You are Maria's best friend, too, I know. She knows it too."

Korablev bowed in silence. I felt very sorry for him. I simply couldn't understand why Maria Vasilievna had refused him. I thought them a suitable pair.

The old lady must have been expecting Maria Vasilievna to call her in and tell her all about it-how Korablev had proposed and how she had refused him. But Maria Vasilievna did not call her. On the contrary, she locked herself in her room and could be heard pacing the floor inside.

Katya finished her drawing of "the Spaniards' first encounter with the Indians" and wanted to show it to her mother, but Maria Vasilievna said from behind the closed door: "Later on, darling."

Somehow the place became dreary after Korablev had left and drearier still when Nikolai Antonich came home and briskly announced that there would be six for dinner, and not three as he had expected.

Willy-nilly, Nina Kapitonovna was obliged to set about it in earnest. Even Katya was called in to help cut out little rounds of dough for the meat pastries with a tumbler. She fell to work with a will, getting flushed and covering herself with flour-nose, hair and all - but she soon tired of it and decided to cut out the rounds with an old inkwell instead of the tumbler, because it made star-shaped rounds.

"It's so much prettier. Grandma," she pleaded.

Then she heaped the stars together and announced that she was going to bake a pie of her own. In short, she was not much of a help.

Six people to dinner! Who could they be? I looked out of the kitchen and counted them coming in.

The first to arrive was the Director of Studies Ruzhichek, nicknamed the Noble Thaddeus. I don't know where he got that nickname—everybody knew only too well how noble he was! Next came the teacher Likho, a stout, bald man with a peculiar elongated head. Then the German-cum-French teacher, herself a German. Our Serafima arrived with the watch on her breast, and last of all an unexpected guest in the person of Vozhikov from the eighth form. In fact, we had here nearly all the members of the School Council. This was rather odd, inviting particularly the whole School Council to dinner.

I sat in the kitchen, listening to their conversation. The doors were open. They started talking about Korablev. Would you believe it! It appeared that he was sucking up to the Soviets. He was trying his damnest "to carve out a career" for himself. He had dyed his moustache. He had organised a school theatre only to "win popularity". He had been married and had driven his wife into an early grave. At meetings, they said, he shed "crocodile tears".

So far this had been conversation, until I heard the voice of Nikolai Antonich and realised that it wasn't conversation but a conspiracy. They wanted to kick Korablev out of the school.

Nikolai Antonich worked up to his subject from afar:

"Pedagogics has always envisaged art as an external factor in education..."

Then he got round to Korablev and first of all "gave him his due for his gifts". It appeared that "the cause of his late wife's death" was nothing to do with us. All that concerned us was "the measure and extent of his influence upon the children". "What worries us is the harmful trend which Ivan Pavlovich is giving to the school, and that is the only reason why we should act as our pedagogic duty prompts us to act—do our duty as loyal Soviet teachers."

Nina Kapitonovna raised a chatter of empty plates and I could not catch exactly what his pedagogic duty prompted Nikolai Antonich to do. But when Nina Kapitonovna served the second dish I gathered from the general conversation what it was they were after.

First, at the next meeting of the School Council Korablev was to be asked to "confine himself to the teaching of geography as prescribed by the syllabus". Second, his activities were to be assessed as "a vulgarisation of the idea of manual education". Third, the school theatre was to be closed down. Fourth and fifth, something else. Korablev, of course, would resent it and would leave. As the Noble Thaddeus said: "Good riddance."

Yes, this was a mean plan and I was surprised that Nina Kapitonovna said nothing. But I soon realised what it was. Round about the middle of the second course she started lamenting the fact that Maria Vasilievna had rejected Korablev. She thought of nothing else, heard nothing else. She kept muttering and shrugging her shoulders, and once even said out aloud: "Well, well! Who asks Mother these days?"

She must have felt sore about Maria Vasilievna not having sought her advice before refusing Korablev.

The guests had gone, but I still couldn't make up my mind what to do.

What beastly luck that Korablev had come to propose on that day of all days. He would have done better to stay at home. I would then have been able to tell Maria Vasilievna all I had heard. But now it was awkward, even impossible, because she had not come out for dinner; she had locked herself in and would not admit anyone. Katya had sat down to her homework. Nina Kapitonovna suddenly announced that she was dog tired and sleepy. She lay down and fell asleep at once. I sighed and took my leave.

CHAPTER NINE

THE REJECTED SUITOR

Lame Japhet, the duty man at the Children's Home, had looked in twice to see if we were asleep or larking about.

The night lamp had been switched on in the corridor. Valya Zhukov's eyelids quivered in his sleep like a dog's. Maybe he was dreaming about dogs? Romashka was snoring. I was the only one awake, thinking all the time. Each thought more daring than the other. I saw myself getting up at the meeting of the school and denouncing Nikolai Antonich, revealing to everyone the mean plan to drive Korablev out of the school. Or I saw myself writing a letter to Korablev. While composing it I fell asleep.

Strangely enough, when I woke up (while the rest were still asleep) I continued the letter from the very point I had left off. I started to recollect the letters which Aunt Dasha had once read to me. At last I made up my mind.

It was still quite early—just gone seven o'clock and it was as dark as night outside. But that did not deter me, of course. Lame Japhet tried to stop me, but I dodged past him and ran out by the back way.

Korablev lived in Vorotnikovsky Street, in a one-storey wooden annex with shutters and a veranda like a summer bungalow. For some reason I was sure that he was not asleep. Obviously, a rejected suitor who had received his rebuff from Maria Vasilievna only the day before, could not be asleep. As a matter of fact, he wasn't. A light was burning in the room and he was standing at the window staring out into the yard-staring so hard that one would think there was God knows what out there. So hard and absorbed that he did not notice me, though I was standing right under the window and making signs to him with my hands.

"Ivan Pavlovich!"

But Ivan Pavlovich frowned, shook his head and moved away.

"Ivan Pavlovich, open the door, it's me!"

He returned a few minutes later with his coat thrown over his shoulders and came out on to the veranda.

"It's me, Grigoriev," I repeated, afraid that he might have forgotten me. He looked at me in an odd sort of way. "I've come to tell you something. They want to shut down the theatre and have you-"

I don't think I said "kicked out". But maybe I did, because he suddenly came to himself.

"Come in," he said tersely.

His place was always clean and tidy, with books on the shelves, a white counterpane on the bed and a cover on the pillow. Everything shipshape. The only thing that wasn't was the host himself, it seems. At one moment he screwed up his eyes, the next he opened them wide, as though things in front of him were getting blurred. I'm sure he had not been to bed that night. I had never seen him looking so tired.

"Ah, Sanya," he said haltingly. "What is it?" "I was going to write you a letter, Ivan Pavlovich," I said earnestly. "It's all because of the school theatre, really. They say you've driven your wife to an early grave."

"Hold on!" he laughed. "Who says I've driven my wife to her grave?"

"All of 'em. 'The cause of his late wife's death is nothing to do with us. Vulgarisation of the idea—that's what worries us.' " "I don't understand a thing," Korablev said gravely. "Yes, vulgarisation," I repeated firmly. I had been memorising these words since the previous day:

"vulgarisation", "popularity", "loyal duty". I had said "vulgarisation", now there remained "popularity" and "loyal duty".

"At the meetings he sheds crocodile tears," I plunged on. "He started that theatre stunt in order to win popularity. Yes, 'popularity'. He sucks up to the Soviets. We must do our loyal duty."

I may have got it a bit mixed up, but it was easier for me to rattle off by heart what I had heard the night before than to tell it in my own words. Anyway, Korablev understood me. Understood me perfectly well. His eyes immediately lost their former clouded look and a tinge of colour mounted to his cheeks and he paced up and down the room.

"This is great fun," he muttered, though there was no fun in it for him at all. "And, of course, the boys and girls don't want to see the theatre closed down?" "Sure they don't."

"Is it because of the theatre that you've come?" I was silent. Perhaps it was because of the theatre. Or perhaps because the school would be a

dull place without Korablev. Or perhaps because I didn't like the mean way they were plotting to get rid of him.

"What fools!" Korablev said suddenly. "What abysmally dull fools!"

He squeezed my hand, and started pacing the room again with a thoughtful air. During his pacing he went out, probably into the kitchen, fetched a boiling kettle, brewed tea and got glasses down from a small cupboard on the wall.

"I was thinking of leaving, but now I've decided to stay," he said. "We'll fight. What d'you say, Sanya? And now let's have some tea."

I don't know whether they ever held that School Council meeting at which Korablev was to pay heavily for "vulgarising the idea of manual education". Obviously it wasn't held, because he had not been made to pay for it. Every morning old Whiskers combed his moustache in front of the mirror as though nothing had happened and went in to take his lessons.

Within a few days the theatre announced production of Ostrovsky's play *Every Man Has a Fool in His Sleeve,* with Grisha Faber in the leading role.

Two dark, curly-haired boys from the local branch of the Komsomol came down to organise a Komsomol group in our school. Valya asked from the floor whether Children's Home boys could enrol in the group, and they said, yes, they could, provided they had reached the age of fourteen. I did not know myself how old I was. I figured that I was getting on for thirteen. To be on the safe side I said I was fourteen. All the same they wouldn't believe me. It may have been because I was small for my age that time.



The only teachers who attended this meeting were Korablev and Nikolai Antonich. Korablev made a rather impressive speech, first congratulating us briefly on the formation of the Group, then criticising us at length for being poor pupils and hooligans. Nikolai Antonich also made a speech. It was a fine speech, in which he greeted the Branch representatives, whom he described as the young generation, and ended up by reciting a poem of Nekrasov's.

After the meeting I met him in the corridor and said: "Good morning, Nikolai Antonich!" For some reason he did not answer me.

In short, all was in order, and I don't know what made me suddenly change my mind about going to the Tatarinovs and decide to meet Katya in the street the next day and give her the modelling-knife and clay she had asked for. Within half an hour, however, I had changed my mind again.

The old lady answered the door, but kept it on the chain, when she saw me. She seemed to be debating with herself whether to let me in or not. Then she quickly opened the door, whispered to me:
"Go into the kitchen," and gave me a gentle push in the back.

While I hesitated, rather surprised, Nikolai Antonich came into the hall, and seeing me, he switched on the light.

"A-ah!" he said in a suppressed voice. "You're here."

He gripped my shoulder roughly.

"You ungrateful sneak, scoundrel, spy! Get out of this house and stay out! Do you hear?"

His lips drew back in a snarl and I caught the glint of a gold tooth in his mouth. This was the last thing I saw in the home of the Tatarinovs. With one hand Nikolai Antonich opened the door and with the other he threw me out onto the landing like a pup.

CHAPTER TEN

I GO AWAY

There was nobody in the Children's Home, nobody in the school. Everyone had gone out—it was a Sunday. Only Romashka wandered about the empty rooms, counting something to himself-probably his future wealth-and the cook in the kitchen sang as he prepared dinner. I settled myself in a warm cosy corner by the stove and fell to thinking.

Yes, this was Korablev's doing. I had tried to help him, and this was how he had repaid me. He had gone to Nikolai Antonich and given me away.

They had been right-Nikolai Antonich, and the German-cum-French teacher and even Likho, who had said that Korablev shed "crocodile tears" at meetings. He was a cad. To think that I had been sorry for him because Maria Vasilievna had rejected him!

Romashka was sitting by the window, counting.

"Goodbye, Romashka," I said to him. "I'm going away."

"Where to?"

"Turkestan," I said, though a minute before that I had not had a thought about Turkestan.

"You're kidding!"

I slipped off the pillow-case and stuffed all my belongings into it—a shirt, a spare pair of trousers, and the black tube which Doctor Ivan Ivanovich had left with me long ago. I smashed all my toads and hares and flung them into the rubbish-bin. The figure of the girl with the ringlets on her forehead who looked a little like Katya went in there too.

Romashka watched me with interest. He was still counting in a whisper, but with nothing like his previous fervour.

"If for one ruble forty thousand, then for a hundred rubles..."

Goodbye school! I would never study any more. What for? I had been taught to read, write and count. What more did I need? Good enough for me. And nobody would miss me when I was gone. Maybe Valya would remember me for a moment, and then forget.

"Then for a hundred rubles four hundred," Romashka whispered. "Four hundred thousand per cent on a hundred rubles."

But I would be coming back. And Korablev, who would be kicked out of the school, would come to me moaning and begging me to forgive him. No fear!

Then suddenly I recollected how he had stood by the window when I called on him, staring into the yard, very sad and a little tipsy. It

couldn't be him, surely? Why should he have betrayed me? On the contrary, he had probably given no sign, pretending not to know anything about that secret council. I was wrong to suspect him. It wasn't him at all. Then who could it be?

"Ah, it's Valya!" I suddenly said to myself. "When I got back from the Tatarinovs I had told him everything. It was Valya!"

But Valya, I remember, had started snoring in the middle of my story. Besides, Valya would never do a thing like that.

Romashka, maybe? I looked at him. Pale, with red ears, he sat on the window-sill, multiplying away like mad. I fancied that he was watching me furtively like a bird, with one round flat eye. But he knew nothing, how could he?

Now that I had firmly decided that it was not Korablev, there was no sense in going away. But my head was aching and my ears were ringing, and somehow I felt that I had to go, I couldn't stay, not after Г had told Romashka I was going.

With a sigh, I picked up my bundle, nodded to Romashka and went out. I must have been running a temperature, because on going out into the street I was surprised to find it so cold. But then, while still in the entrance, I had taken off my jacket and put my overcoat on over my shirt. I had decided to flog the jacket—I figured that it would fetch round about fifteen million.

For the same reason—my temperature and headache—I have no clear memory of what I did at the Sukharevka black market, though I spent practically the whole day there. All I remember was standing in front of a stall from which came a smell of fried onions, holding up my jacket and saying in a weak voice: "Anybody want a jacket?"

I remember being surprised at having such a weak voice. I remember noticing in the crowd a huge man wearing two shipskin coats. He was wearing one with his arms in the sleeves, while the other—the one he was selling-was thrown over his shoulders. I found it very odd that wherever I went, hawking my merchandise, I kept running into this man. He stood motionless, huge, bearded, clad in two coats, gloomily naming his price without looking at the customers, who turned back the skirts and fingered the collar.

I stood about, trying to warm myself, and noticed that though I no longer felt cold, my fingers were blue. I was very thirsty, and several times I decided-no more: if I don't sell the thing in half an hour, I'll go to the teashop and swap it for a glass of hot tea. But the next moment I had a sort of hunch that a buyer would turn up in a minute, and so I decided to stick it for another half hour.

I remember it was a sort of consolation to see that the tall man had not been able to sell his coat either.

I felt like eating a little snow, but the snow at Sukharevka was very dirty and the boulevard was a long way off. In the end I did go to the boulevard and ate some snow, which, strange to say, seemed warm to me. I think I was sick, or maybe I wasn't. All I knew was that I was sitting in the snow and somebody was holding me up by the shoulders because I had gone limp. At last the support was removed and I lay down and stretched my legs out luxuriously. Somebody was saying something over me, it sounded like: "He's had a fit. He's an epileptic." Then they tried to take my pillow-slip bundle and I heard them coaxing me: "Don't be silly, we're putting it under your head!", but I clung to it

and wouldn't let go. The man in the two coats passed by slowly, then suddenly threw one of the coats over me. But that was already delirium and I understood that perfectly well. They were still tugging at the pillow-slip. I heard a woman's voice saying: "He won't let go of his bundle." Then a man's: "Never mind, lay him down with his bundle." And again: "Looks like the Spanish 'flu."

Then the world went dark.

I was at death's door, and twice they screened me off from the other patients in the ward. Cyanosis is always a sign of approaching death, and I had it so bad that all the doctors except one, gave me up as a bad job and only exclaimed every morning with surprise: "What, still alive?"

All this I learned when I came round.

Be that as it may, I did not die. On the contrary, I got better.

One day I opened my eyes and was about to jump out of bed, thinking I was in the Children's Home. Someone's hand arrested me. Somebody's face, half-forgotten yet so familiar, drew close to mine. Believe it or not, it was doctor Ivan Ivanovich.

"Doctor," I said to him, and what with joy and weakness I started crying. "Doctor, ear!"

He looked at me closely, probably thinking that I was still delirious.

"Hen, saddle, box, snow, drink, Abraham," I said, feeling the tears pouring right down into my mouth. "It's me, Doctor. I'm Sanya. Don't you remember, that village, Doctor? We hid you. You taught me."

He looked at me closely again, then blew out his cheeks and let the air out noisily.

"Oho!" he said, and laughed. "Do I remember! Where's your sister? Fancy that! All you could say then was 'ear' and that sounded like a bark. So you've learnt to speak, eh? And moved to Moscow too? Took it into your head to die?"

I wanted to tell him that I wasn't thinking of dying at all, just the opposite, when he suddenly put his hand over my mouth, whipped out a handkerchief with the other and wiped my face and nose.

"Lie still, old chap," he said. "You mustn't talk yet. Who knows what you'll be up to next—you've been dying so many times. One word too many and you may pop off."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A SERIOUS TALK

If you think that, having come round, I was on the road to recovery, you are mistaken. Hardly had I pulled through the Spanish 'flu than I went down with meningitis. And again it was Ivan Ivanovich who refused to acknowledge that my game was up.

He sat for hours at my bedside, studying the strange movements which I made with my eyes and hands. In the end I came to again, and though I lay for a long time with my eyes rolled up to the sky, I was no longer in.

"No longer in danger of dying," as Ivan Ivanovich put it, "but in danger of remaining an idiot for the rest of your life."

I was lucky. I did not remain an idiot, and after my illness I even felt somehow more sensible than I was before. It was a fact, though the illness had nothing to do with it.

Be that as it may, I spent all of six months in hospital. During that time Ivan Ivanovich and I saw each other almost every other day. We talked together about old times. It appears that he had been in exile. In 1914, for being a member of the Bolshevik Party, he had been sentenced to penal servitude and then to exile for life. I don't know where he served his sentence, but his place of exile was somewhere far away, by the Barents Sea.

"I escaped from there," he said laughing, "and came running straight to your village and nearly froze to death on the way."

That's when I learnt why he had stayed awake nights in our cottage. He had left the black tube—the stethoscope-with me and my sister as a keepsake. One word leading to another, I told him the story of when and why I had run away from the Children's Home.

He heard me out attentively, and for some reason kept looking straight in my mouth.

"Yes, wonderful," he said thoughtfully. "A rare case indeed."

I thought he meant my running away from the Home being a rare case and was about to tell him it wasn't such a rare thing as he thought, when he said again:

"Not deaf and dumb, but dumb without being deaf. *Stummheit ohne Taubheir*. To think that he couldn't say 'Mummy'! And now, a regular orator!"

And he began telling the other doctors about me.

I was a bit disappointed that the doctor had not said a word about the affair that had made me leave the Home, and if anything, had seemed to let it drift past his ears. But I was mistaken, for one fine day the door of our ward opened and the nurse said: "A visitor for Grigoriev."

And in came Korablev.

"Hullo, Sanya!"

"Hullo, Ivan Pavlovich!"

The whole ward stared at us with curiosity.

Perhaps that was why he started by only talking about my illness. But when all had switched their attention back to their own affairs, he began to scold me. And a good piece of his mind did he give me! He told me, word for word, exactly what I had thought about him and said it was my duty to go to him and tell him: "Ivan Pavlovich, you're a cad" if I thought he was one. But I had not done this, because I was a typical individualist. He relented a bit when, completely crushed,. I asked: "Ivan Pavlovich, what's an idividualist?"

In short, he kept going at me until visiting time was over. In taking his leave, however, he shook my hand warmly and said he would come again.

"When?"

"In a day or two. I'm going to have a serious talk with you."

The next visiting day Valya Zhukov came to see me and for two blessed hours talked about his hedgehog. On leaving he reminded himself that Korablev sent me his regards and said he would call on me one of these days.

I twigged at once that this was going to be the serious conversation. Very interesting! Going to give me some more of his mind, I thought.

The talk started with Korablev asking me what I wanted to be.

"I don't know," I said. "An artist, perhaps."

His eyebrows went up and he said:

"No good."

Truth to tell, I had never thought of what I wanted to be. In my heart of hearts I wanted to be somebody like Vasco Nufiez de Balboa. But Ivan Pavlovich's "no good" had been so positive that it put my back up.

"Why not?"

"For many reasons," Korablev said firmly. "For one thing because you haven't enough character."

I was dumbfounded. It had never occurred to me that I had no character.

"Nothing of the sort," I said sulkily. "I have a strong character."

"No you haven't. How can a man have a character when he doesn't know what he'll be doing the next hour. If you had any character you'd be doing better at school. But you were studying poorly."

"Ivan Pavlovich," I cried in despair, "I only had one 'unsatisfactory' mark."

"But you could study very well if you wanted to."

He paused, waiting for me to say something, but I was silent.

"You have more imagination than intelligence."

He paused again.

"And generally, it's high time you figured out what you're going to make of your life and what you are in this world for. Now you say, 'I want to be an artist.' But to become that, my dear boy, you'd have to become quite a different person."

CHAPTER TWELVE

I START THINKING

It's all very well to say you've got to become quite a different person. But how are you to do it? I didn't agree that I had done so badly in my studies. Only one "unsatisfactory", and in arithmetic at that, and only because one day I had cleaned my boots and Ruzhichek had called me out and said:

"What do you polish your boots with, Grigoriev? Bad eggs in paraffin oil?"

I had answered him back, and from that day on he had kept giving me "unsatisfactory" marks. Nevertheless, I felt that Korablev was right and that I had to become quite a different person. Did I really lack character? I'd have to check that. I must make a resolution to do something and do it. For a start I resolved to read *A Hunter's Sketches,* which I had started to read the year before and given up because I found it very dull.

Strange! I took the book again from the hospital library, and after some five pages I found it duller than ever. More than anything else in the world now I wished I had not made that resolution. But I had to keep my word, even if I had given it to myself, whispered it under my blanket.

I waded through *A Hunter's Sketches* and decided that Korablev was wrong. I did have character.

I ought to test my mettle again. Every morning, say, do the daily dozen and then take a sponge down with cold water straight from the tap. Or get through the year in arithmetic with "excellent" marks. But all this could wait until I went back to school. Meanwhile I must think and think.

At last Ivan Ivanovich examined me for the last time and said I was fit to be discharged from hospital. What a glorious day that was! We parted, but he gave me his address and told me to call on him.

"Not later than the twentieth, mind," he said. "Or you may not find me in, old chap."

I left the hospital, bundle in my hand, and after walking a block, sat down on a curbstone—I was that weak. But how good I felt! What a big place Moscow was! 1 had forgotten it. And how noisy the streets were! I felt dizzy, but I knew that I wouldn't fall. I was well and would live. I had recovered. Goodbye, hospital! Hail, school!

Truth to tell, I was a bit disappointed at the rather cool reception I was given at the school. Romashka was the only one to ask me: "Better?" And that in a tone of voice as though he was rather disappointed that I had not died.

Valya was glad to see me, but he had other things on his mind. His hedgehog had got lost and he suspected that the cook, on Nikolai Antonich's orders, had thrown it into the dust-bin.

Big changes had taken place in the school during those six months. For one thing it was half its size, some of the senior classes having been transferred to other schools.

Secondly, it had been painted and whitewashed—the once dirty rooms with their grimy windows and black ceilings were simply unrecognisable.

Third, the Komsomol Group was now the talk of the school. The tubby Varya was now its secretary. She must have been a good secretary, because when I got back I found the little room of the Komsomol office the most interesting place in the school. Though I wasn't a member of the Komsomol yet, I was given an assignment by Varya only two days after coming out of the hospital. I was to draw an aeroplane soaring among the clouds and write over it the motto: "Young people, join the S.F.A.F.!"(S.F.A.F.-Society of Friends of the Air Force.-translator)

My fingers were still stiff and not like my own, but I set to work with a will

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE SILVER FIFTY-KOPECK PIECE

The day I intended to call on Doctor Ivan Ivanovich the school was thrown into commotion first thing in the morning.

Valya's hedgehog had been found. It appears that he had somehow got into the attic and landed inside an old cabbage cask, where he had spent over a fortnight. He was in very bad shape and there was nothing for it but to take him to the university, where a laboratory of some kind bought hedgehogs. Valya wrapped him up in an old pair of trousers and went off. He was back within an hour, looking sad, and sat down on his bed.

"They'll cut him open," he said, fighting back his tears.

"What d'you mean?"

"What I said. They'll slit his belly open and rummage about inside. Poor thing."

"Never mind," I said. "You'll buy another one. How much did you get for him?"

Valya opened his fist. The hedgehog had been more dead than alive and they had given him only twenty kopecks.

"I have thirty," I said. "Let's put them together and buy a spinning-tackle." I said that about the spinning-tackle on purpose, to cheer him up.

We put our money together and even exchanged our ten and fifteen-kopeck coins for one new silver fifty-kopeck piece.

This hedgehog business of Valya's had detained me, and by the time I started out for the doctor's place darkness had begun to fall. He lived a good distance away, on Zubovsky Boulevard, and the trams were no longer free of charge like they were in 1920.1 wangled it, though, took a free ride.

Only one window had a light in it in the house on Zubovsky Boulevard—a white house with columns, standing back in a garden—and I decided that this must be the doctor's room. I was wrong. The doctor, as it happened, lived on the first floor, whereas the light was burning on the ground floor. Flat No. 8. Here it was. Under the number was scrawled in chalk: "Pavlov lives here, not Levenson." Pavlov was my doctor Ivan Ivanovich.

A woman with a baby in her arms answered the door and kept "shushing" all the time while she asked me what I wanted. I told her. Still shushing, she said the doctor was in, but she thought he was asleep.

"Knock at the door, though," she whispered. "He may be awake."

"I'm not asleep," the doctor called out from somewhere. "Who is it?"

"A boy."

"Let him in."

This was my first visit to the doctor and I was surprised to find his room in such disorder. On the floor, amidst a jumble of packets of tea and tobacco, lay leather gloves and curious but handsome fur high boots. The whole room was cluttered with open suitcases and rucksacks.

And amidst this chaos, a tripod in his hand, stood Doctor Ivan Ivanovich.

"Ah, Sanya," he said cheerfully. "You've come. Well, how goes it? Alive and kicking?"

"Fit as a fiddle."

"Fine! Do you cough?"

"No."

"Good lad! I've written an article about you, old chap."

I thought he was joking.

"A rare case of dumbness," said the doctor. "You can read it yourself in number seventeen of *The Medical Journal*. Patient G. That's you, old chap. You've made a name for yourself. Only as a patient, though, so far. The future is still yours."

He started to sing: "The future is still yours, still yours, still yours!" then suddenly pounced on one of the largest suitcases, slammed the lid down and sat down on it the better to shut it.

The doctor spoke quite a lot that day. I had never seen him so jolly. Suddenly he decided that I had to be given something as a present and gave me the leather gloves. Though they were old ones, they were still very good and did up by means of a strap. I was on the point of refusing, but he didn't give me a chance. He thrust them at me, saying: "Take them and shut up."

I ought to have thanked him for the present, but instead I said: "Are you going away?"

"Yes," the doctor said. "I'm going to the Far North, inside the Arctic Circle. Heard of it?"

I vaguely recalled the letter of the navigating officer.

"Yes."

"I left my fiancйe there, old chap. Know what that is?"

"Yes."

"No you don't. At least you know, but don't understand."

I began to examine the various queer things he was taking with him: fur trousers with triangular leather seats, metal boot soles with straps to them, and so on. And the doctor kept talking all the time while he packed. One suitcase refused to stay shut. He took it by the lid and tipped it out onto the bed. A large photograph fell at my feet. It was a yellowed photograph, pretty old, bent in a number of places. On the back was written in a large round hand: "Ship's company of the schooner *St. Maria"*. I started to examine the photograph, and to my surprise I found Katya's father on it. Yes, it was him all right. He was sitting right in the middle of the crew, his arms folded across his chest, exactly as in the portrait hanging in the Tatarinovs' dining-room. I couldn't find the doctor on the photograph, though, and asked him why this was.

"The reason is, old chap, that I didn't sail in the schooner *St. Maria,"* the doctor said, puffing mightily as he strapped down the suitcase.

He took the photograph from me and looked round where to put it.

"Somebody left it as a keepsake."

I wanted to ask who that person was, whether it was Katya's father, but he had already slipped the photograph into a book and put the book in one of the rucksacks.

"Well, Sanya," he said, "I've got to be going. Write and tell me what you're doing and how you're getting on. Don't forget, old chap, you're a rare specimen!"

I wrote down his address and we said goodbye.

It had gone ten by the time I reached the Home and I was a little afraid the doors would be locked. But they weren't. They were open and the lights were on in all the rooms. What could it be?

I tore pell-mell into the dormitory. Empty! The beds were made— the boys must have been preparing to turn in.

"Uncle Petya!" I yelled and saw the cook coming out of the kitchen in a new suit, with his hat in his hand. "What's happened?"

"I'm invited to the meeting," he informed me in a mysterious whisper. I heard no more, as I was running upstairs into the school.

The assembly hall was packed to overflowing and boys and girls crowded round the doorway and in the corridor. But I got in all right. 1 sat down in the front row, not on a seat, but on the floor right in front of the platform.

It was an important meeting chaired by Varya. Very red, she sat among the platform party with a pencil in her hand, tossing back a lock of hair which kept tumbling over her nose. Other boys and girls from the Komsomol Group sat on either side of her, busily writing something down. And over the heads of the platform party, facing the hall, hung my poster. I caught my breath. It was my poster-an aeroplane soaring among the clouds, and over it the words: "Young People, Join the S.F.A.F.!" What my poster had to do with it I couldn't make out for quite a time, because all the speakers to a man were talking about some ultimatum or other. It wasn't until Korablev took the floor that the thing became clear to me.

"Comrades!" he said quietly but distinctly. "The Soviet Government has had an ultimatum presented to it. On the whole, you have taken the proper measure of this document. We must give our own answer to that ultimatum. We must set up at our school a local group of the Society of Friends of the Air Force!"

Everyone clapped, and thereafter clapped after each phrase Korablev uttered. He ended up by pointing to my poster and it made me feel proud.

Then Nikolai Antonich took the floor, and he, too, made a very good speech, and after that Varya announced that the Komsomol Group were joining the S.F.A.F. in a body. Those who wished to sign on could do so at her office tomorrow from ten to ten, meanwhile she proposed taking a collection for Soviet aviation and sending the money in to *Pravda*.

I must have been very excited, because Valya, who was also sitting on the floor a little way off, looked at me in surprise. I got out the silver fifty-kopeck piece and showed it to him. He twigged. He wanted to ask me something, probably something about the spinning-tackle, but checked himself and just nodded.

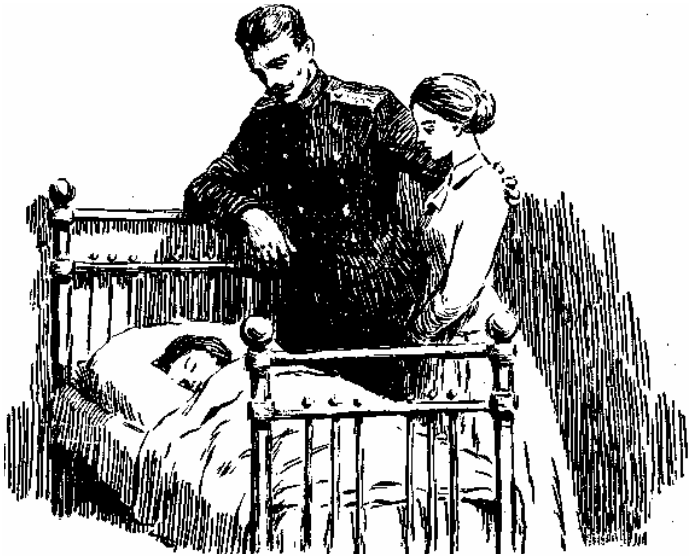
I jumped up on to the platform and gave the coin to Varya.

"Ivan Pavlovich," I said to Korablev, who was standing in the corridor smoking a cigarette in a long holder, "at what age do they take on airmen?"

He looked at me gravely.

"I don't know, Sanya. I don't think they'd take you yet."

Not take me? I thought of the oath Pyotr and I had once sworn to each other in Cathedral Gardens: "To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield". I did not say it out loud, though. Korablev would not have understood anyway.



PART THREE

OLD LETTERS

CHAPTER ONE

FOUR YEARS

As in the old silent films, I see a big clock with the hand showing years instead of hours. One-full circle and I see myself at lesson-time with Korablev, sharing the same desk with Romashka. We have made a bet, a bet that I will not cry out or pull my hand away if Romashka slashes me across the fingers with a penknife. It is a test of willpower. According to the "rules for developing willpower" I must learn "not to give vent to my feelings". Every evening I repeat these rules over and over, and now at last I have a chance of putting myself to the test.

The whole class is watching us. Nobody is listening to Korablev, though today's lesson is an interesting one; it's a lesson about the manners and customs of the Chukchi people. "Come on!" I say to Romashka.

And that cold-blooded beast saws at my finger with his penknife. I do not cry out, but I can't help pulling my hand away and I lose the bet.

A gasp and a whisper ran round the desks. Bleeding, I purposely give a loud laugh to show that I don't feel the slightest pain, and suddenly Korablev orders me out of the classroom. I leave the room with my hand thrust in my pocket. "You needn't come back."

But I do come back. It is an interesting lesson and I listen to it outside the door, sitting on the floor.

Rules for developing willpower! I had spent a whole year over them. I had tried not only to "conceal my feelings", but "not to care for the opinion of people I disdain". I don't remember which of these rules was the harder-the first one, probably, because my face always gave me away.

"Sleep as little as possible, for in sleep the will is absent - this was no hard task either, not for a man like me. I leant to make my "plan for the whole day first thing in the morning", and have been following this rule all my life. As for the main rule, "remember the purpose of your existence", I did not have to repeat that too often, as this purpose was clear to me even in those days.

Another full circle: an early winter morning in 1925. I wake up before anyone else, and I lie there thinking, not quite sure whether I am awake or still asleep. I am thinking of the Tatarinovs. I had not been to see them for two years. Nikolai Antonich still hates me. There isn't a single sibilant in my name, yet he contrives to hiss it. Nina Kapitonovna still loves me; the other day Korablev passed on to me her "regards and greetings". I wonder how Maria Vasilievna is getting on? Still sitting on the couch and smoking? And Katya?

I look at the clock. Getting on for seven. Time to get up. I had made a vow to get up before the bell goes. I run on tiptoe to the washroom and do my exercises in front of the open window. It is cold, snowflakes fly in at the window, whirling, settling on my shoulders, melting. I wash down to my waist, then start reading my book. That wonderful book of Amundsen's about the South Pole, which I am reading for the fourth time.

Yet another full circle, and I see myself in a small familiar room in which, for three years, I have spent nearly all my evenings. I have been given my first assignment by the Komsomol Group—to take charge of the collective reading of the newspapers. The first time is rather terrifying, because you have to answer questions too. I know "the present situation", "the national policy" and "world problems". Best of all, though, I know the world flying records for altitude, endurance and duration. What if I am suddenly asked about price cuts? But everything goes off smoothly.

Another full circle, and I am seventeen.

The whole school is assembled in the hall. Behind a long red table sit the members of the court. On the left—counsel for the defence; on the right-the public prosecutor. In the dock—the defendant.

"Defendant, what is your first name?"

"Eugene."

"Surname?"

"Onegin."

That was a memorable day.

CHAPTER TWO

*THE TRIAL OF EUGENE ONEGIN**

* *(Eugene Onegin-the* title and principal character of Pushkin's poem -*Tr.*)

At first no one in the school took any interest in the idea. But when one of the actresses of our school theatre suggested staging "The Trial of Eugene Onegin" in costume, the whole school started talking about it.

Grisha Faber was invited to play the leading role. He was studying now at the Theatrical School, but would sometimes come to see our first nights for old times' sake. Our own actors were to play the part of witnesses. No period costume could be found for the Larin's nurse and so we had to let ourselves be persuaded that nurses in Pushkin's day dressed much the same as they did in ours. The defence was entrusted to Valya, our tutor Sutkin was to be the public prosecutor and I the judge.

The offender, wearing a wig, a blue tail-coat, shoes with bows on them and knee-length stockings, sat in the dock, coolly cleaning his nails with a broken pencil. Every now and then he would pass a remote supercilious eye over the public and the members of the court. That must have been his idea of how Eugene Onegin would have borne himself in similar circumstances.

Old Mrs Larina and her daughters and the nurse sat in the witnesses' room (what used to be the teachers' room). They, on the contrary, were all in a dither, especially the nurse, who was remarkably youthful and pretty for her years. Counsel for the defence was excited too. He kept nervously tapping a bulky file with documents. The material evidence-two old pistols-lay on the table before me. At my back I could hear the producers whispering hurriedly among themselves.

"Do you plead guilty?" I asked Grisha. "Guilty of what?"

"Of murder under guise of a duel," the producers prompted in a whisper.

"Of murder under guise of a duel," I said, adding, after consulting the charge-sheet, "of the poet Vladimir Lensky, aged eighteen."

"Never!" Grisha said haughtily. "One has to distinguish between a duel and murder."

"In that case, we shall proceed to examine the witnesses," I said. "Citizeness Larina, what evidence can you give in this affair?"

At rehearsal this had gone off smoothly, but here everyone felt that it did not work. Everyone except Grisha, who was quite in his element. At one moment he produced a comb and started to groom his side-burns, the next he tried to stare at the members of the court out of countenance, or tossed his head proudly with a defiant smile. When the witness, old Mrs Larina, spoke about Onegin having been treated in their home like one of the family, Grisha covered his eyes with one hand and placed the other on his heart to show how he was suffering. He acted wonderfully and I noticed that the female witnesses, especially Tatiana and Olga, just couldn't keep their eyes off him. I don't blame Tatiana-after all, she was in love with him in the story-but Olga, now, she was completely out of character. The audience, too, had eyes only for Grisha and no one paid the slightest attention to us.

I called the next witness—Tatiana. My, she talked nineteen to the dozen! She was absolutely unlike Pushkin's Tatiana, and the only point of resemblance, if there was one, were the curls falling to her shoulders and the heel-length gown. To my question whether she considered Onegin guilty of murder, she gave the evasive reply that Onegin was an egoist.

I called on the defence counsel, and from then on everything was topsy-turvy. For one thing, because the defence counsel talked sheer drivel. Secondly, because I had caught sight of Katya.

Of course, in four years she had changed a lot. But her hair, worn in plaits, had the same ringlets on the forehead. She screwed her eyes up in the same old independent way and had the same purposeful nose-I think I should have recognised her by that nose if she lived to a hundred.

She was listening attentively to Valya. It was our biggest mistake, giving the defence to Valya, whose only interest in life was zoology. He started off with the very strange statement that duels were to be observed also in the animal kingdom, but nobody considered them as murder. Then he warmed to the subject of rodents and became so carried away that you kept wondering how he would find his way back to the defence of Eugene Onegin. Katya, though, was listening to him with interest. I knew from former years that when she began to chew on her plait, it meant she was interested. She was the only girl who took no notice of Grisha.

Valya finished rather abruptly, and then came the prosecutor's turn. He was as dull as ditch-water. He spent a whole blessed hour trying to prove that although it was the nineteenth-century society of landowners and bureaucrats who had killed Lensky, nevertheless Eugene Onegin was fully responsible for this murder, "since all duels are murder, premeditated murder".

To cut a long story short, the prosecutor held that Eugene Onegin should be sentenced to ten years' imprisonment with confiscation of his property.

Nobody had expected such a demand, and laughter broke out in the hall. Grisha sprang to his feet proudly, I gave him permission to speak.

Actors are said to feel the mood of an audience. That is what Grisha must have felt, because he led off, shouting at the top of his voice, in order, as he afterwards explained, to "enthuse the audience". This he failed to do. His speech had one fault—you couldn't tell whether he was speaking for himself or for Onegin. Onegin would hardly have said that "even today his hand would not falter in sending a bullet into Lensky's heart".

Anyway, everyone drew a sigh of relief when he sat down, wiping his brow and very pleased with himself.

"The court is retiring to confer."

"Hurry up, you fellows."

"What a bore."

"Dragging it out."

These comments were perfectly justified, and we decided, by tacit consent, to rush through our verdict. To my astonishment, the majority of the members of the court agreed with the public prosecutor. Ten years with confiscation of property. It was clear that Eugene Onegin had nothing to do with it. The sentence was intended for Grisha, who had bored everyone to death, everyone except the witnesses Tatiana and Olga. But I said that it was not fair: Grisha had acted well and without him the whole show would have been a wash-out. We agreed on five years.

"Stand!" the usher called. The members of the court filed in.

Everyone stood up. I read the sentence.

"It isn't right!" .

"Acquit him!"

"Shame!"

"All right, comrades," I said morosely. "I think it's wrong too. I consider that Eugene Onegin should be acquitted, and Grisha should have a vote of thanks. Who's in favour?"

All raised their hands, laughing.

"Adopted unanimously. The meeting is closed."

I was furious. I shouldn't have taken on this thing. Perhaps we should have treated the whole trial as a joke. But how? I felt that everyone saw how lacking in resource and wit I was.

It was in this bad humour that I went out into the cloakroom, and whom should I meet but Katya. She had just got her coat and was making her way to a clear space near the exit.

"Hullo!" she said with a laugh. "Hold my coat, will you. Some trial that was!"

She spoke this as if we had parted only the day before.

"Hullo!" I answered sullenly.

She looked at me with interest.

"You've changed."

"Why?"

"Stuck-up. Well, get your coat and let's go!"

"Where?"

"Oh, where, where! To the comer, if that suits you. You're not very polite."

I went downstairs with her without my coat, but she sent me back.

"It's cold and windy."

This is how I remember her when I caught up with her at the street corner: she was wearing a grey fur cap with the earflaps down, and the ringlets on her forehead had come covered with hoarfrost while I ran back to the school. The wind whipped back the skirt of her coat and she leaned slightly forward, holding it down with her hand. She was of medium height, slim and, I believe, very pretty. I say "I believe" because at that time I did not think about it. Certainly no girl at our school would have dared to order me about like that:

"Get your coat and let's go!"

But then this was Katya, the kid whose hair I had pulled and nose I had poked into the snow. Yes, it was Katya all right!

"I say, why do they all call you 'Captain'? Is it because you want to go to nautical school?"

"I don't know yet," I said, though I had long ago made up my mind that I would go not to a nautical school but to a flying school.

I saw her to the gate of the familiar house and she asked me in.

"It's awkward."

"Why? Your being on bad terms with Nikolai Antonich is no concern of mine. Grandma was talking about you the other day too. Come in."

"No, it's awkward."

Katya shrugged coldly.

"Just as you please."

I caught up with her in the yard.

"How silly of you, Katya! I'm telling you it's awkward. Let's go somewhere together, eh? What about the skating-rink?"

Katya looked at me, then suddenly cocked up her nose, the way she did when a child.

"I'll see," she said importantly. "Phone me up tomorrow round about four. Ouch, how cold it is! Even your teeth freeze."

CHAPTER THREE

AT THE SKATING-RINK

Back in those years when I was mad on Amundsen, a simple thought had occurred to me. It was this: if Amundsen had used an aeroplane he would have reached the South Pole in a fraction of the time. What a hard time he had had, fighting his way day after day through the endless snowy wilderness! For two months he had trudged behind his dogs, who had ended by eating each other. But in an aeroplane he could have reached the Pole in twenty-four hours. He would not have had friends enough and acquaintances whose names he could use for all the mountain peaks, glaciers and plateaux he would have discovered during the flight.

Every day I copied out long passages from accounts of polar expeditions. I cut out from the newspapers paragraphs concerning the first flights to the North and pasted them into an old ledger. On the first page of this ledger was written: *"From* (Forward) is the name of his ship. 'Forward' he says, and forward he strives. Nansen about Amundsen." This was my motto too. Mentally, in an aeroplane, I followed Scott, and Shackleton, and Robert Peary. Along all their routes. And since I had an aeroplane at my disposal, I had to study its design.

Following point 3 of my Rules: "Wilful will do't", I read *The Theory of Aircraft Construction*. Ugh, what agony it was! If there was anything I did not understand, I just learnt it off by heart to be on the safe side.

Every day I took my imaginary aeroplane to pieces. I studied the engine and airscrew. I fitted it with the most up-to-date instruments. I knew it like the back of my own hand. The only thing I didn't know about it was how to fly it. And that was just what I wanted to learn.

I kept my resolution a secret, even from Korablev. At school they considered that I had too many irons in the fire as it was and I did not want them to say of my interest in aviation: "The latest fad!" This was no fad.

Then suddenly I revealed my secret. To whom? To Katya.

That day we had arranged to go to the skating-rink first thing in the morning, but something kept cropping up to prevent us. First Katya put it off, then I. At last we started out, but our skating started off on the wrong foot. For one thing, we had to wait half an hour in the frost, because the rink was snowed up and closed while they were clearing it. Secondly, Katya's heel broke off the first time round and we had to tie the skate down with a strap, which I had brought with me just in case. But my strap kept coming undone. We had to go back to the cloakroom and ask the help of the dour, red-faced mechanic who was grinding skates there. At last, all was in order. It had started snowing again and we skated for a long time hand in hand, in big half-circles, now to the right, now to the left. This figure is called "curve eight".

Then we sat down right in front of the bandstand, and Katya suddenly brought her flushed face with its dancing black eyes close to mine. I thought she wanted to say something in my ear and said loudly: "Eh?"

She laughed.

"Nothing. It's hot."

"Katya," I said, "shall I tell you something? You won't tell anybody, will you?"

"Not a soul."

"I'm going to flying school."

She blinked, then stared hard at me.

"You've made up your mind?"

"Uhu."

"Positively?"

I nodded.

The band suddenly struck up and I didn't catch what she said as she shook the snow from her jacket and frock.

"I don't hear you!"

She grasped my hand and we skated down to the other side of the rink, to the children's play area. It was dark and quiet there, and all snowed up. The toboggan slide had fir trees planted along the sides and little fir trees grew around the area. We might have been in a wood, somewhere out of town.

"Will they take you?"

"The school?"

"Yes."

It was a dreadful question. Every morning I did my daily dozen on Anokhin's system and took a cold sponge down on Muller's. I felt my muscles and thought: "What if they don't take me?" I had my eyes, ears and heart examined. The school doctor said I was healthy. But there were different kinds of health; how was he to know I wanted to enter a flying school? What if I had bad nerves? Or something else wrong with me? My height! My height, damn it! During the last year I had grown only by three-quarters of an inch.

"They'll take me," I said confidently.

Katya regarded me with what looked like respect.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHANGES

I never talked with Katya about her domestic affairs. I only asked her how Maria Vasilievna was getting on and she answered: "Thanks, she's all right."

"And Nina Kapitonovna?"

"Thanks, she's all right."

Maybe it was all right, but I didn't think so. Katya's spirits dropped when she had to go home. Obviously, things had gone wrong at home. Shortly afterwards I met Maria Vasilievna and she confirmed me in this belief.

We met at the theatre at a performance of *Princess Turandot*. Katya had managed to get three tickets, the third being for Nina Kapitonovna. But Nina Kapitonovna, for some reason, could not go, and so I took the ticket instead.

We arrived at the theatre from different places and Katya was very nearly late. She came running in after the ticket-collector had closed the doors.

"Where's Mum?"

Her mother was in her seat. She called to us as we made our way to our seats, stepping on somebody's feet in the darkness.

There had been a lot of talk at school about *Princess Turandot'* and we had even tried to stage it. So, during the first act, I had no time to look at Maria Vasilievna. I only noticed that she was just as beautiful, if not more so. She wore her hair differently, exposing the whole of her high white forehead. She sat erect and had eyes for nothing but the stage.

In the interval, however, I had a good look at her and was upset. She had gone thinner and looked older. Her eyes were enormous and altogether sombre. It occurred to me that anyone seeing her for the first time might well be startled by that gloomy look.

We talked about *Princess Turandot* and Katya declared that she did not like it very much. I did not know whether I liked it or not, so I agreed with Katya. Maria Vasilievna thought it was wonderful.

"You and Katya are too young, you don't understand."

She asked me about Korablev, how he was getting on, and I thought a tinge of colour came into her face when I said: "He's quite all right."

As a matter of fact he was feeling none too good. He had not forgotten, of course, that she had refused him.

She may have been a bit sorry for this now. Otherwise she wouldn't be asking about him in such detail. She was even interested to know what forms he was teaching and how he got on with the pupils.

I answered in monosyllables and in the end she got cross with me.

"Faugh, Sanya, I can't get a word out of you! 'Yes', 'no'. Have you swallowed your tongue?" she said with annoyance.

Then, going off at a tangent, she began to talk about Nikolai Antonich. Very odd. She said that she considered him a fine man. I said nothing.

The interval was over and we went in for the second act. During the next interval she started talking about Nikolai Antonich again. I noticed that Katya frowned. Her lips stirred as if she was about to say something, but she checked herself.

We walked round the foyer, Maria Vasilievna talking all the time about Nikolai Antonich. It was unbearable. It was also astonishing, because I had not forgotten what her former attitude to him had been.

Nothing of the sort! The man was kindness and nobility itself. All his life he had helped his cousin (it was the first time I had heard Maria Vasilievna refer to her late husband as Ivan) even when he himself was having a bad time. He had given his whole fortune to fit out his last hapless expedition.

"Nikolai Antonich believed in him," she said earnestly.

All this I had heard from Nikolai Antonich himself, almost in the same phrases. Maria Vasilievna never used to repeat his words before. There was something behind this. For all the eagerness and earnest-ness with which she spoke I sensed that she was trying to persuade herself

that Nikolai Antonich really was a remarkable person and that her late husband owed everything to him.

This was on my mind all through the third act. I decided that I would ask Katya about her father point blank. The portrait of the naval officer with the broad brow, the set jaw and light dancing eyes suddenly rose before me. What was this expedition from which he had never returned?

After the show we lingered in the auditorium until the cloakroom crowds had thinned out.

"I say, Sanya, why don't you ever drop in?" Maria Vasilievna said.

I mumbled something.

"I'm sure Nikolai Antonich has long forgotten that silly affair," she went on. "If you like, I'll talk to him about it."

The last thing I wanted was for her to get permission from Nikolai Antonich for me to call on them. I was on the point of saying, "Thanks, I'd rather you didn't," when Katya interposed, saying that it was nothing whatever to do with Nikolai Antonich, as I would be coming to see her and not him.

"Oh, no!" Maria Vasilievna said, startled. "Why only you? He'll be coming to see me, too, and Mother."

CHAPTER FIVE

KATYA'S FATHER

Now that expedition. What kind of man was Katya's father? All I knew was that he had been a naval officer and was dead. But was he? Katya never spoke of him as dead. Except for Nikolai Antonich, who constantly referred to him as "my late cousin", the Tatarinovs did not talk about him very often. His portraits hung in all the rooms, but they seldom spoke about him.

In the end I got tired of speculating, all the more as one could simply ask Katya where her father was and whether he was alive or dead. That's what I did.

And this is what she told me.

She was only three, but she clearly remembered the day her father went away. He was a tall man in naval blues and had big hands. Early in the morning, while she was still asleep, he had come into her room and bent over her cot. He patted her head and said something. It sounded like: "Look, Maria, how pale she is. Promise me she'll be out in the fresh air as much as possible." And Katya had opened her eyes just a wee bit and seen her mother's tear-stained face. But she gave no sign she was awake-it was such fun pretending to be asleep. Afterwards they were sitting in a big brightly lit hall at a long table on which stood white little hillocks. These were table-napkins. Katya was so fascinated by these table-napkins that she did not notice that her mother had left her and in her place now sat Grandma, who kept sighing and saying: "My

goodness!" And Mother, in a strange unfamiliar dress with puffed sleeves, sat next to Father and winked to Katya from afar.

It was very jolly at table, there were lots of people, all laughing and talking together loudly. Then Father got up, a glass of wine in his hand, and everyone fell silent. Katya did not understand what he was saying, but she remembered everyone clapping and cheering when he had finished, and again Grandma muttered "My goodness!" and sighed. Then everyone said goodbye to Father and to some other sailors, and at parting he had tossed Katya high up in the air with his kind, big hands.

"Well, Maria darling," he had said to Mother. And they had kissed each other on both cheeks.

This had been a farewell dinner and send-off of Captain Tatarinov at the Ensk railway station. He had come to Ensk in May 1912 to say goodbye to his family, and in the middle of June he had set sail from St. Petersburg in the schooner *St. Maria* bound for Vladivostok.

At first everything went on as before, except that something quite new had appeared in life—letters from Daddy. "There will soon be a letter from Daddy." And a letter there would be. Sometimes it took a week or two coming, but it always came. And then came the last letter, sent from Yugorsky Shar in the Arctic. It really was the last, but Mother was not particularly worried; she even said that this was as it should be: the *St. Maria* was sailing in places where there was no post, nothing but ice and snow.

It was as it should be. Daddy himself had written that there would be no more letters. Still, it was very sad, and Mother became more and more silent and sad every day.

"A letter from Daddy" was a splendid thing. Grandma, for instance, always baked a pie when a letter came from Daddy. And now, instead of that splendid thing which cheered everyone up, there appeared in life that long and dreary phrase: "It is as it should be," or "There can't be anything yet."

These words were repeated every day, especially in the evenings, when Katya went to bed and Mother and Grandma kept talking and talking. And Katya listened. She had long been wanting to say:
"Maybe the wolves have eaten him up," but she knew that would make Mother angry, so she didn't.

Father was "wintering". Here in town summer had come long since, while he was still "wintering". This was very odd, but Katya asked no questions. She had heard Grandma one day say to a neighbour: "We keep saying he's wintering, but God knows whether he's alive or not."

Then Mother wrote a petition to "His Most Gracious Majesty". Katya remembered that petition very well—she was a big girl by now. The wife of Captain Tatarinov petitioned that an auxiliary expedition be fitted out to rescue her unfortunate husband. She pointed out that the main reason for the voyage "was undoubtedly national pride and our country's honour". She hoped that "His Most Excellent Majesty" would not leave without support a brave explorer, always ready to give his life for the sake of the "nation's glory".

Katya thought of "His Most Gracious Majesty" as some sort of religious procession led by a bishop in a crimson hat. It turned out to be simply the Tsar. For a long time the Tsar did not answer and Grandma used to scold him every evening. At last a letter came from his chancellery. Very politely, the chancellery advised Mother to apply to the Minister of Marine. But it wasn't worthwhile applying to him. The

matter had already been reported to him and he had said: "It's a pity Captain Tatarinov has not returned. I should have had him prosecuted for negligence in the handling of government property."

Then Nikolai Antonich had come to Ensk and new words had appeared in the house: "No hope whatever." He had said this to Grandma in a whisper. But everyone got to know about it somehow—Grandma's relations, the Bubenchikovs, and Katya's friends. Everyone except Mother.

No hope whatever. He would never come back. Never say something funny, never argue with Grandma about it being "good for you to drink a glass of vodka before dinner and if it didn't do you good, it did not harm either, and since it did no harm it was nice". Never again would he make fun of Mother for taking so long to dress when they went to the theatre. No one would hear him sing in the mornings as he dressed: "What is our life? A game!"

No hope whatever! He had remained somewhere far away, in the Far North, amid the snow and ice, and no one from his expedition had come back.

Nikolai Antonich said Father himself was to blame. The expedition had been fitted out excellently. There had been five tons of flour alone, over a ton and a half of Australian tinned meat, and twenty hams; more than a hundredweight of Skorikov's beaf-tea cubes, and biscuits, macaroni and coffee galore. Half the mess room had been partitioned off and biscuit stowed away in it. They had even taken asparagus—eighty pounds of it. Jam and nuts. And all this bought with Nikolai Antonich's money. Eighty splendid huskies, so that in case of an emergency they could return home by dog-teams.

In short, if Daddy had lost his life it was undoubtedly his own fault. One could imagine him, for instance, being in a hurry where he should have bided his time. According to Nikolai Antonich, he had always done things in a hurry. However that may be, he had remained out there in the Far North and nobody knew whether he was alive or dead, because none of the crew of thirty had come back.

But in their own home he was still alive and had remained so for a long time. Who knows but that the door might suddenly open and he would walk in! Just as he had been that last day at the Ensk railway station. In his blue uniform, and stiff collar open at the throat. Cheerful, with big hands.

A good many things in the house were still associated with him. Mother smoked, and everyone knew she had started to smoke when he was lost. Grandma chased Katya out of the house-and that was him again, for he had given orders that Katya was to have plenty of fresh air. The learned books with the queer titles in the narrow glass-fronted bookcase, which were lent to nobody, were his books. Then they had moved to Moscow, to Nikolai Antonich's flat, and everything was changed. No one now hoped that the door would suddenly open and he would come in. For this was a strange house, in which he had never been.

CHAPTER SIX

MORE CHANGES

Maybe I would not have gone to the Tatarinovs had not Katya promised to show me the Captain's books and maps. I looked up the route and found it to be that famous Northeast Passage for which men had been searching for three hundred years. Finally, the Swedish explorer Nordenskiold navigated it in 1878. It was no easy job, no doubt, because it was a full quarter of a century before another explorer, Vilkitsky, repeated the journey, only in the opposite direction. In short, all this was so interesting that I decided to go.

Nothing had changed in the Tatarinovs' flat, except that there were noticeably fewer things about. Among others, the Levitan, which I had liked so much, had gone-that picture of a straight wide garden path and pine trees lit up by the sun. I asked Katya what had happened to it.

"Given away," was Katya's curt reply.

I said nothing.

"Presented to Nikolai Antonich," she added with sudden venom. "He adores Levitan."

It looked as if other things besides the Levitan had gone to Nikolai Antonich, because the dining-room had an empty sort of look. The ship's compass, though, stood in its old place with the needle still pointing North.

Nobody was at home, neither Maria Vasilievna nor the old lady.

Afterwards the old lady came in. I heard her taking her things off in the hall and complaining to Katya that everything had got so dear again-cabbage was sixteen kopecks, veal thirty kopecks, a prayer for the dead forty kopecks, eggs one ruble twenty kopecks.

I laughed and went out into the hall.

"What about lemons, Nina Kapitonovna?"

She looked round puzzled.

"Didn't the boys pinch a lemon?"

"Sanya!" exclaimed Nina Kapitonovna, throwing up her hands.

She dragged me to the window and looked me over from all sides. The inspection displeased her.

"Too short," she said with chagrin. "You don't grow."

She looked quite old, stooped and thin. The familiar green velvet coat hung loosely on her shoulders. But she still had the same brisk, preoccupied air, which now was quite cheerful. She was overjoyed to see me, much more so than I had expected.

Katya and I spent a long time looking through the Captain's books and charts. There was Nansen's *Farthest North* and *Sailing Directions for the Kara Sea* and others. There were not many books as books go, but each one was interesting. I was dying to ask for one to read, but of course I understood very well that this was not the thing to do. I was therefore surprised when Katya suddenly said:

"Would you like to borrow some?"

"May I?"

"You may," Katya said without looking at me.

I did not ponder much over the reason why this trust was shown me and set about selecting the books I wanted to read. I would have taken the lot if I could, but that was impossible, so I selected five of them. Among them, by the way, was a booklet by the Captain himself entitled: *Causes of the Failure of the Greely Expedition.*

I had timed my visit to the Tatarinovs so as not to run into Nikolai Antonich there. At that hour he was always at a meeting of the Teachers' Council. But the meeting must have been put off, because he came in. Katya and I were so busy chatting that we did not hear the doorbell ring and only became aware of him when footsteps sounded in the next room, followed by a dignified cough. Katya frowned and slammed the door shut.

In almost the same instant it was opened again and Nikolai Antonich appeared in the doorway.

"I've asked you a thousand times, Katya, not to slam the door," he said. "It's time you got out of these habits..."

He saw me at once, of course, but he did not say anything, just narrowed his eyes slightly and nodded. I nodded back.

"We live in human society," he went on blandly. "And one of the motive forces of this society is consideration for others. You know perfectly well, Katya, that I can't stand doors being banged. One can only presume that you are doing this on purpose. But I don't want to think that, no, I don't..."

And so on and so forth.

I realised at once that all this waffle was just meant to tease Katya. He had never dared to talk to her like that before, I remember.

He went away at last, but we no longer had felt like looking through the Captain's books. Besides, all the time Nikolai Antonich had been talking, Katya had stood screening the table on which the books lay. He had not noticed anything. But I knew what it was all about-she did not want him to know she was letting me take those books.

In short, a damp was thrown over our spirits and I began to take my leave. I came home with a heavy feeling. I was sorry for them all— for Maria Vasilievna, for the old lady, for Katya. I didn't like the changes in the Tatarinovs' home at all.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MARGINAL NOTES

It was my last year at school, and really I should have been applying myself to my studies instead of going to skating-rinks and paying visits. I was doing well in some subjects (mathematics and geography, for instance) and not so well in others—literature, for example.

Literature in our school was taught by Likho, a very stupid man, whom the whole school called "Old Moke". He always went about in a tall Kuban cap, and we used to draw that cap on the blackboard with donkey's ears sticking out of it. Likho did not like me for a number of

reasons. In the first place, one day, while dictating something, he said "carnaval" instead of "carnival". I corrected him and we argued about it, and I suggested sending an inquiry to the Academy of Sciences. He resented this.

Secondly, most of the pupils wrote their compositions from the books and articles—they would read a piece of criticism and copy it out. This was not my way. I wrote my essay first, then read the critics. And this was what Likho did not like! He wrote over my essays:
"Trying to be original. Poor!" In short, I was very much afraid I would get bad marks for literature at the end of the year.

For our final, school-leaving essay, Likho offered us a number of subjects, the most interesting of which I thought to be "The Peasantry in Post-Revolution Literature". I went to work on it in earnest, but soon cooled off—possibly because of the books Katya had lent me. After these books, my own essay seemed as dull as ditch-water to me.

To say that these books were interesting is to say nothing. They were books which had belonged to Katya's father, an Arctic sea-captain lost amid the snow and ice, like Franklin, Andree and others.

I never read anything so slowly in all my life. Nearly every page had markings on it, some passages were underlined and there were question marks and exclamation marks in the margins. The Captain either "quite agreed" or "absolutely disagreed". He argued with Nansen—to my astonishment. He reproached him for having turned back when within two hundred and fifty miles of the Pole. On the chart affixed to Nansen's book, the extreme northern point of his drift was ringed with a red pencil. Apparently, this occupied the Captain's mind very much, because he returned to it again and again in the margins of other books. "The ice itself will solve the problem," was written down the side of one page. I turned the page and suddenly a small sheet of yellowed paper fell out of the book. It had writing on it in the same hand. This is what it said:

"The human mind was so absorbed by this problem, that the solving of it, despite the desolate graves which most of the explorers had found there, had become a sheer national contest. Nearly all civilised countries took part in this contest with the exception of Russia, although the impulse towards discovery of the North Pole was very strong among the Russians even in Lomonosov's time and is still strong today. Amundsen is determined at all costs to win for Norway the honour of reaching the Pole, but we will set out this year and prove to the world that Russians too are capable of such a feat."

This must have been a fragment from some memorandum, for written on the back of it was: "To the Head of the Hydrographical Board" with the date "April 17th 1911".

So that was what Katya's father was after! He wanted, like Nansen, to go as far North as possible with the drifting ice and then make the Pole on dog-teams. By force of habit I figured out how much quicker it would be by aeroplane.

What puzzled me was this: in the summer of 1912 the schooner *St. Maria* had set sail for Vladivostok from St. Petersburg. Where did the North Pole come in?

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE BALL

"The Peasantry in Post-Revolutionary Literature" was finished. Fed up, I dashed it off in a single night. I had other debts, too—German, for instance, which I hated. In short, at the end of the half-year Katya and I had been to the skating-rink only once, and then we had not skated. The ice was very rough, as hockey teams had been training on it since the morning. We just drank tea at the buffet. It was our last meeting before the holidays. After that came lessons and more lessons, reading and more reading. I got up at six in the morning and sat *over Aircraft Construction.*

And now the half-year was over. Eleven free days! The first thing I did was to phone Katya and invite her to our school for the fancy-dress ball.

Katya arrived rather late, when I had all but run to the phone to ring her up. She came half-frozen, red as a beetroot, and while still in the cloakroom ran straight to the stove. I took care of her coat and galoshes.

"What a frost!" she said, laying her cheek to the warm stove. "Must be two hundred degrees!"

She was wearing a blue velvet dress with a lace collar and had a big blue bow in her hair.

It was amazing how that bow and the blue dress became her, and that string of coral beads round her neck! She was robust, yet light and slender. In short, hardly had we entered the hall, where the dancing had already begun, than the school's best dancers dropped their partners and made a beeline for her. For the first time in my life I regretted that I did not dance. But there! I tried to look as though I did not care and went into the performers' dressing-rooms. But they were getting ready to come on, and the girls chased me out. I went back into the hall just as the waltz was finishing. I hailed Katya. We sat down and began chatting.

"Who's that?" she suddenly asked me, horrified.

I looked.

"Where?"

"Over there, the one with the red hair."

It was only Romashka. He had smartened up and I thought he looked quite presentable. But Katya was looking at him with distaste.

"Can't you see-he's just horrible," she said, "You're used to him, you don't notice it. He's like Uriah Heep."

"Like who?"

"Uriah Heep."

I pretended I knew who Uriah Heep was, and said meaningfully: "Ah!"

But Katya was not one to be easily taken in.

"Ugh, you-fancy not having read Dickens. And he's supposed to be intelligent."

"Who says that?"

"Everybody. I was talking to a girl from your school one day, and she said: 'Grigoriev is a distinct individuality.'"

Just then the band struck up again and our P. T. instructor, whom everyone called just Gosha, asked Katya to dance and I was left alone again. This time the performers let me in and even found some work for

me to do. I had to make up one of the girls as a rabbi. Some job! I spent over half an hour at it and when I got back into the hall Katya was still dancing-this time with Valya.

Someone pinned a number on me—they were playing "Post". I sat there like a convict with a number on my chest, feeling bored. Suddenly I got two letters at once: "Stop pritending. Say frankly whom you like. Reply to No. 140." It was written just like that— "pritending". The other note was enigmatic: "Grigoriev is a distinct individuality, but he hasn't read Dickens." I wagged a finger at Katya. She laughed, dropped Valya and sat down next to me.

"It's great fun here," she said, "but terribly hot. Well, will you learn to dance now?"

I said I would not, and we went into my classroom. It had been turned into a sort of crushroom, with armchairs in the corners and electric lamps shaded with red and blue paper. We sat down on my desk—the farthest one in the right-hand row. I don't remember what we talked about, I think it was about the talking films. Katya had her doubts about them, but I cited proofs showing the comparative speeds of sound and light.

She was all blue—we were sitting under a blue lamp—and perhaps that was what made me so bold. I had long been wanting to kiss her, from the moment she had come in frozen and flushed and laid her cheek against the stove. But it had been impossible then. Now, when she was all blue, it was possible. I stopped in the middle of a sentence, closed my eyes and kissed her on the cheek.

Did she flare up!

"What does this mean?" she demanded.

I was silent. My heart was thumping and I was afraid that she was going to say "I don't want to know you any more" or something like that.

"How disgusting!" she said with indignation.

"No, it isn't," I said, dismayed.

For a minute we said nothing, then Katya asked me to bring her some water. When I returned with the water she read me a whole lecture. She proved as plain as a pikestaff that I had no feelings for her, that "I only imagined it", and that if it had been another girl in her place at the moment I would have kissed her too.

"You're just trying to persuade yourself," she said with conviction, "but actually it's nothing of the sort!"

She was ready to admit that I had not intended to insult her-I hadn't, had I? Still I should not have acted that way precisely because I was only deceiving myself, and there was no real feeling...

"No love," she added, and I felt, in that semi-darkness, that she blushed.

By way of reply I took her hand and passed it over my face and eyes. She did not withdraw it, and for several minutes we sat silent on my desk in the dimly lit classroom. We sat in the classroom where I asked questions and floundered, where I stood at the blackboard and proved theorems-on my desk, in which lay Valya's crumpled cribs. It was so strange. But so good! I can't tell you how good I felt at that moment!

Then I fancied there was somebody in the corner breathing hard. I looked round and saw Romashka. I don't know what made him breathe so hard, but he had a very ugly look on his face. Naturally, he saw at

once that we had spotted him. He muttered something and came up with a queasy smile.

"Why don't you introduce me, Grigoriev?"

I stood up. I must have looked anything but affable, because he blinked in a scared sort of way and went out. It was rather funny, the way he took sudden fright. We both started giggling, and Katya said that he not only resembled Uriah Heep, but he was like an owl, a ginger owl with a hook-nose and round eyes. She had guessed right— Romashka was sometimes teased at school by being called Owl. We went back into the hall.

The dancing was over and the concert part of the programme had started with scenes from *The Government Inspector,* which our theatre was rehearsing.

Katya and I sat together in the third row, but we heard nothing. At least, I didn't. And I don't think she did either. I whispered to her:

"We'll have another talk. Yes?"

She looked at me gravely and nodded.

CHAPTER NINE

MY FIRST DATE. INSOMNIA

It wasn't the first time it happened with me that life, after moving in one direction—in a straight line, let's say—suddenly made a sharp turn, executing "Immelmanns" and "Barrels". *(Figures in aerobatics).*

This happened when, a boy of eight, I had lost my penknife near the murdered watchman on the pontoon bridge. This happened at the Education Department's reception centre, when, out of sheer boredom, I had begun to model figure-work. This happened when I found myself a reluctant witness to the conspiracy against Korablev and was ignominiously ejected from the Tatarinov home. And this is what happened now, when I was expelled again-this time for good!

The new turn in my life started this way. Katya and I had arranged to meet in Oruzheiny Street, outside the tinsmith's shop, but she did not turn up.

Everything seemed to have gone wrong that sad day. I ran away from the sixth lesson-it was silly, because Likho had said he would give back our homework after the lesson. I wanted to think over our conversation. But how could I think when, after a few minutes, I was frozen stiff and all I could do was stamp my feet and rub my nose and ears like mad.

Yet it was all devilishly interesting! What an extraordinary change had come about since the previous day! Yesterday, for instance, I could say: "Katya's a stupid head!" But not today. Yesterday I could have ticked her off for being late, but not today. But most interesting of all was to think that this was the very same Katya who had once asked me whether I had read *Helen Robinson,* who had busted the lactometer and got it in the neck from me. Could this be her?

"Yes!" I thought joyfully.

But she was not she now, and I was not I.

A whole hour had passed, though. It was quiet in that street, and only the small tinsmith with the big nose came out of his workshop several times and eyed me suspiciously. I turned my back on him, but this only seemed to deepen his suspicions. I crossed to the other side of the road, but he still stood in the doorway amid clouds of vapour, like God on the ceiling of the cathedral at Ensk. I was obliged to move away, down towards the Tverskaya.

They had had dinner by the time I got back to the school. I went into the kitchen to warm myself and got told off by the cook, who gave me a plate of lukewarm potatoes. I ate the potatoes and went off in search of Valya. But Valya was at the Zoo. Likho had given my homework to Romashka.

Being upset, I did not notice the state of excitement Romashka was thrown into when he saw me. He went all of a dither when I came into the library where we were in the habit of doing our homework. He laughed several times without apparent reason and hastily handed me my homework.

" 'Old Moke' at it again," he said ingratiatingly. "If I were you, I'd complain."

I thumbed through my work. Down the side of every page was drawn a red line and at the bottom it was written: "Idealism. Extremely poor."

"Fathead," I commented coolly and walked out. Romashka came running after me. I was surprised at the way he fawned on me that day, running ahead of me and peering into my face. I suppose he was glad that I had done so badly with my homework. The real reason for this behaviour never occurred to me.

I was in bed before the boys had returned from their excursion. I really should not have gone to bed so early. Sleep fled my eyes the moment I shut them and turned over on my side.

It was the first case of insomnia in my life. I lay very still, thinking. About what? About everything under the sun, I believe. About Korablev and how I would take my homework to him tomorrow and ask him to read it. About the tinsmith who had taken me for a thief. About Katya's father's booklet *Causes of the Failure of the Greely Expedition*.

But whatever my thoughts, they always came back to her. I began to doze, and all of a sudden found myself thinking of her with such tenderness that it took my breath away and my heart started beating slowly and loudly. I saw her more distinctly than if she had been at my side. I could feel the touch of her hand on my eyes.

"Ah, well, if you've fallen in love, you've fallen in love. Now let's get some sleep, my dear chap," I said to myself.

But now that I was feeling so happy I thought it a pity to go to sleep, though I did feel a bit sleepy. I fell asleep when day began to break and Uncle Petya in the kitchen started grumbling at Makhmet, our kitten.

CHAPTER TEN

TROUBLES

The first date and first insomnia, though something new, were still part of the good old life. The troubles started the next day, however.

I phoned Katya after breakfast, but had no luck. Nikolai Antonich answered the phone.

"Who wants her?"

"A friend."

"What friend?" I was silent.

"Well?"

I hung up.

At eleven I entrenched myself in a greengrocer's shop from which I could see the whole length of Tverskaya-Yamskaya. Nobody took me for a thief this time. I pretended to be using the phone, bought some pickled apples and hung around the doorway with a casual air. I was waiting for Nina Kapitonovna. I knew from previous years exactly when she returned from the market. At last she appeared small, bent, in her green velvet coat, carrying her umbrella—in such a frost'-and the invariable shopping bag.

"Nina Kapitonovna!"

She glanced at me coldly and walked on without saying a word. I was dumbfounded.

"Nina Kapitonovna!"

She set her bag down, straightened up and looked at me resentfully. "Look here, young man," she said sternly, "I shouldn't like to quarrel with you for old time's sake. But don't let me see or hear you any more." Her head shook slightly.

"You go this way, we go that! And no writing or phoning, please! I don't mind telling you this-I never would have believed it! I see I was mistaken!"

She snatched up her bag, and-bang!-shut the gate right in my face. I stared after her open-mouthed. Which one of us had gone mad? I or she?

This was the first disagreeable conversation. It was followed by a second, and then by a third.

Going home, I met Likho at the front door. I couldn't have chosen a worse time to talk to him about my essay.

We mounted the stairs together, he, as usual, with his head in the air, twisting his nose this way and that in such a stupid fashion that I was strongly tempted to kick him.

"Mr Likho," I suddenly said, "I received my homework. You write:

'Idealism'. This isn't a mark, it's an accusation, which has to be proved first."

"We'll talk about that some other time."

"No, we'll talk about it now," I said. "I'm a Komsomol member and you accuse me of idealism. You don't know a thing about it." "What, what's that?" he demanded, glaring at me. "You have no idea about idealism," I went on, noting with satisfaction that with every word of mine his ugly mug grew longer. "You're just trying to be nasty to me, that's why you've written:

'Idealism.' No wonder they say of you-"

I paused for a moment, feeling that I was about to say something shockingly rude. I said it nevertheless:

"That you have a head like a coconut, hard outside and watery inside."

This was so unexpected that we were both thunderstruck. Then, with flaring nostrils, he said briefly and ominously: "I see!" And off he strode.

Exactly an hour after this conversation Korablev sent for me. This was an ominous sign, for Korablev seldom summoned anyone to his house.

It was long since I had seen him looking so angry. With bent head, he paced the room and when I came in, he drew aside with something like distaste.

"Look here!" he started, his moustache bristling. "You're giving me a fine account of yourself. It makes pleasant news!"

"Ivan Pavlovich, I'll explain everything to you in a minute," I said, trying hard to speak calmly. "I don't like the critics, that's true. But that doesn't make me an idealist. The other boys and girls copy everything out from the critics. And that's what he likes. Let him first prove that I'm an idealist. He ought to know that for me that's an insult."

I held my exercise book out to him but he did not even glance at it.

"You'll have to explain your conduct at the Teachers' Council."

"Certainly! Ivan Pavlovich," I said suddenly, "is it long since you were at the Tatarinovs?"

"Why?"

"Nothing."

"Well, my lad," he said quietly, "I see you had some reason for being rude to Likho. Sit down and tell me all about it. No fibs, mind."

I would not have told my own mother that I had fallen in love with Katya and had been thinking about her all night. That was impossible. But I had long been wanting to tell Korablev about the changes that had taken place in the home of the Tatarinovs, changes which I did not like at all.

He heard me out, pacing from comer to corner of the room. From time to time he stopped and looked around with a sad expression. My story seemed to distress him. At one moment his hand even went to his head, but he caught himself and made as if he were stroking his forehead.

"All right," he said when I asked him to telephone the Tatarinovs and find out what it was all about. "I'll do that. You call back in an hour."
"Make it half an hour, Ivan Pavlovich!" He smiled—a sad, good-natured smile.

I came back to find Korablev sitting on the sofa, smoking. The shaggy green service jacket, which he always wore when he felt out of sorts, was thrown over his shoulders and the soft collar of his shirt was undone.

"Well, old chap, you shouldn't have asked me to phone them," he said. "Now I know all your secrets." "What secrets?"
He looked at me as though he were seeing me for the first time. "You've got to be able to keep them," he went on. "And you're no good at that. Today, for instance, you're courting someone and tomorrow the whole school gets to know about it. It wouldn't be so bad if it were only the school."

I must have looked pretty sheepish, because Korablev smiled in spite of himself, just the ghost of a smile. At least twenty thoughts raced through my head all at once: "Who's done this? Romashka! I'll kill him! That's why Katya didn't come. That's why the old lady snubbed me."

"I love her, Ivan Pavlovich," I said firmly. He spread his hands.
"I don't care whether the whole school talks about it or not!" "The school maybe," Korablev said. "But don't you care what Maria

Vasilievna and Nina Kapitonovna may say about it?" "No I don't!" I protested hotly. "But weren't you shown the door at their house?" "What house? It isn't her house. She dreams of the day she'll finish school and leave that house."

"Just a minute... Do you mean to say you intend to marry her?" I collected myself somewhat. "That's nobody's business!"

"Of course not," Korablev hastily put in. "I'm afraid it's not so simple though. You'll have to ask Katya, after all. Perhaps she isn't planning to get married yet. In any case you'll have to wait till she gets back from Ensk."

"Ah," I said very calmly. "So they've sent her away? Fine." Korablev looked at me again, this time with unconcealed curiosity.

"Her aunt has fallen ill and she's gone to visit her," he said. "She'll be away several days and will be back for the beginning of the term. That shouldn't worry you."

"I'm not worrying, Ivan Pavlovich. As for Likho, I'll apologise to him, if you wish. But let him take back his statement about my being an idealist."

Then, for fifteen minutes, as though nothing had happened, as though Katya had not been sent away, as though I had not decided to kill Romaska, we sat calmly discussing my homework. Then I took my leave, after getting permission to call again the next day.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I GO TO ENSK

That Romashka! I did not doubt for a moment that it was his doing. Who else could it be? He had been in the classroom and seen me kiss Katya.

I stared with hatred at his cot and the bedside table and waited for him in the dormitory for half an hour. Then I wrote a note demanding an explanation and threatening that if I did not get it I would denounce him as a cad in front of the whole school. Then I tore the note up and went to see Valya at the Zoo.

He was with his rodents, of course. In a dirty lab coat, a pencil behind his ear and a big notebook under his arm, he was standing by a cage and feeding bats, who were eating out of his hand. He was feeding worms to them, looking mightily pleased.

I hailed him. He looked round and I asked: "Have you got any money?"

"Twenty-seven rubles," Valya said proudly.

"Let's have 'em."

This was cruel, as I knew that Valya was saving up to buy some snakes or other. But what could I do? I had only seventeen rubles, and the fare cost that much more.

Valya blinked, then looked at me gravely and got out the money.

"I'm going away."

"Where to?"

"To Ensk."

"What for?"

"Tell you when I get back. Meanwhile, let me tell you-Romashka's a cad. You're chummy with him, because you don't know what a cad he is. And if you do know, then you're a cad yourself. That's all. So long."

I had one foot outside the door when Valya called me back, and in such a queer voice that I spun round.

"Sanya," he muttered, "I'm not chummy with him. Besides..."

He fell silent.

"It's my fault," he went on with an air of decision. "I should have warned you. You remember that business about Korablev, don't you?"

"I should say so!"

"Well, it was him!"

"What about him?"

"He went to Nikolai Antonich and told him everything."

"No!"

In a flash I recollected that evening when, on returning from the Tatarinovs, I had told Valya about the conspiracy they were hatching against Korablev.

"But I only told you about it."

"Yes, but Romashka was eavesdropping."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

Valya hung his head.

"He made me give my word of honour," he muttered. "Besides, he threatened that he'd look at me at night. You know I hate being looked at at night. It's silly, I know. It started with me waking up once to find him looking at me."

"You're simply a fool, that's all."

"He writes everything down in a book and then snitches to Nikolai Antonich," Valya went on miserably. "He makes life hell for me. He narks on people and then tells me all about it. I stop my ears, but he goes on telling."

"You're a poor yap, you are!" I said. "I've no time to talk to you now, but I think you ought to write to the Komsomol group about that little book of his. I never thought he'd bully you like that. How many words of honour did you give him?"

"I don't remember," Valya mumbled.

"We'll count 'em up."

He looked at me mournfully.

From the Zoo I went to the railway station to book my ticket, and from there back to school. I had a good case of drawing instruments and decided to take it with me to sell if I was up against it.

And now to all the follies I had committed was added another one—one that I had to pay for with interest.

When I entered the dormitory there were about ten people there, among them Tania Velichko, a girl from my form. They were all engaged in some occupation, some reading and others talking. Nobody was paying any attention to Romashka, who was kneeling by my bed and rummaging in my box.

This new act of treachery was the last straw. The blood rushed to my head and I went over to him with an even tread and said to him in an even voice: "What are you looking for, Romashka?"

He looked up at me with startled eyes, and worked up as I was at that moment, I could not help noticing his striking resemblance to an owl—with that white face of his and those big red ears.

"Katya's letters?" I went on. "Want to hand them over to Nikolai Antonich? Here they are. Take 'em."

And I kicked him hard in the face.

I had spoken in a quiet voice, so nobody expected that I was going to hit him. I believe I gave him two or three more kicks. I would have killed him but for Tania Velichko. While the boys stood open-mouthed, she rushed between us, grabbed hold of me and pushed me away with such force that I sat down on the bed.

"You're crazy."

As if through a mist I saw her face and realised that she was looking at me with abhorrence. I recollected myself.

"I'll explain everything, boys," I said shakily.

They were all silent. Romashka lay on the floor with his head thrown back. There was a blue bruise on his cheek. I took my box and went out.

I wandered heavy-hearted about the railway station for nearly three hours. I felt beastly as I read the newspaper, studied the timetable, and drank tea in the third-class buffet. I was hungry, but the tea seemed tasteless and the sandwiches wouldn't go down my throat. I somehow felt sullied after that scene in the dormitory. Ah, well, I didn't have to go back to school anyway. But the instrument case? Who the hell needed it? As if I couldn't get the money for my return fare from Aunt Dasha!"

CHAPTER TWELVE

HOME AGAIN

One impression has remained with me after that journey through the places where Pyotr Skovorodnikov and I used to ramble, stealing and begging - an impression of incomparable freedom.

For the first time in my life I was travelling by rail with a ticket. I could sit at the window, chat with my fellow-passengers, or smoke, had I been a smoker. I did not have to crawl under the seat when the ticket-collector came round. I handed him my ticket with a casual air, without interrupting my conversation. It was an extraordinary sensation—a feeling of spaciousness, though the carriage was pretty crowded. I found it amusing, and I was thinking now about Ensk— about my sister, Aunt Dasha, and how I would spring a surprise on them and they would not recognise me.

With this thought I fell asleep and slept so long that my fellow-passengers began to wonder whether I was alive or not.

How good it is to return to one's home town after an absence of eight years! Everything is so familiar yet unfamiliar. Could that be the governor's house? I had thought it so huge once. Could that be Zastennaya Street? Was it so narrow and crooked? And is it

Lopukhinsky Boulevard? The boulevard gladdened me, though: all down the main avenue, behind the lime trees, stretched a line of splendid new buildings. The black lime trees looked like a pencil drawing on a white background and their black shadows lay aslant on the white snow- it made a beautiful picture.

I walked fast, and at every step I kept recognising old landmarks or viewing new ones with surprise. There was the orphanage in which Aunt Dasha had been going to put my sister and me; it was now a green colour and a big marble plaque had appeared on the wall with gold lettering on it. I could not believe my eyes-it said: "Alexander Pushkin stayed in this house in 1824". Well I never! In that house! What airs the orphanage kids would have given themselves had they known this!

And here were the "Chambers", where Mother and I had once handed in a petition. The place did not look half as imposing now. The old low grating had been removed from the windows and at the gate hung a signboard saying: Cultural Centre.

And there were the ramparts. My heart beat faster at the sight of them. A granite embankment stretched before me, and I hardly recognised our poor old shelving river bank. But what astonished me more than anything was to find our houses gone and in their place a public garden had been laid out and on the seats sat nannies holding infants wrapped up like little mummies. I had expected anything but this. I stood for a long time on the ramparts surveying with amazement the garden, the granite embankment and the boulevard, on which we used to play tipcat. On the site of the common back of the small grocery and oil shops there now stood a tall grey building, outside which a guard in a huge sheepskin coat strode up and down. I accosted him.

"The town power station," he answered importantly, when I pointed to the building and asked what it was.

"Do you happen to know where Skovorodnikov lives?"

"The judge?"

"No."

"Then I don't know. We have only one man here by that name-
the judge."

I walked away. Could it be that old Skovorodnikov had become a judge? I turned round to have another look at the fine tall building erected on the site of our wretched old houses, and decided that it could be.

"What does the judge look like? Is he tall?"

"Yes."

"With whiskers?"

"No, he has no whiskers," the guard said. He sounded sort of offended for old Skovorodnikov.

H'm, no whiskers. Not much hope.

"Where does that judge live?"

"In Gogolevsky Street, in what used to be Marcouse's house.

I knew the house, one of the best in the town, with lions' heads on either side of the entrance. Again I was nonplussed. There was nothing for it but to go down to Gogolevsky Street, and I went, little hoping that old Skovorodnikov had shaved off his moustache, become a judge and taken up residence in such a posh house.

In less than half an hour I was in Gogolevsky Street at the Marcouse house. The lions' heads were eight years older, but as impressive and

fearsome as ever. I stood irresolute at the wide covered entrance door. Should I ring or not? Or should I ask a policeman where the Address Bureau was?

Muslin curtains in Aunt Dasha's taste hung in the windows and that decided me. I rang the bell.

The door was opened by a girl of about sixteen in a blue flannel dress, her smoothly brushed hair parted in the middle. She was of a dark complexion, and that puzzled me. "Do the Skovorodnikovs live here?" "Yes."

"And is ... er ... Darya Gavrilovna at home?" I said, giving Aunt Dasha her full title.

"She'll soon be in," the girl said, smiling and regarding me with curiosity. She smiled just like Sanya, but Sanya was fair and had curly hair and blue eyes. No, this wasn't Sanya. "May I wait?" "Certainly."

I took my coat off in the hall and she showed me into a large well-furnished room. The place of honour in it was occupied by a grand piano. This did not look much like Aunt Dasha.

I was gazing about me with what must have been a rather sheepish and happy expression, because the girl was staring at me with all her eyes. All of a sudden she tilted her head and cocked up an eyebrow exactly the way Mother used to do. I realised that it was Sanya after all. "Sanya?" I queried, somewhat uncertainly. She looked surprised. "Yes."

"But you were fair," I went on in a shaky voice. "How comes it? When we lived in the village you were quite fair. But now you're all on the darkish side."

She was dumbfounded, even her mouth fell open. "What village?"

"When Father died!" I said, and laughed. "Don't say you've forgotten ! Don't you remember me?"

I felt choky in the throat. After all I had loved her very much and hadn't seen her for eight years, and she looking so much like Mother.

"Sanya," she brought out at last. "My God! Why, we had given you up for dead long ago." She embraced me.

"Sanya, Sanya! Is it really you! But sit down, why are you standing? Where have you come from? When did you arrive?"

We sat down side by side, but she jumped up the next moment and ran into the hall to get my box.

"Wait a minute! Don't go away. Tell me how you're getting on. How's Aunt Dasha?"

"How about yourself? Why didn't you write to us? We've been searching for you. We even put notices in the papers." "I didn't see them," I said remorsefully.

Only now did I fully realise how beastly I had behaved. Fancy forgetting that I had such a sister. And such a wonderful Aunt Dasha, who couldn't even be told that I had come back, because she was likely to die of joy, as Sanya explained to me.

"And Pyotr's been looking for you too," she went on. "He wrote to Tashkent not long ago. He thought maybe you were living in Tashkent."

"Pyotr?"

"Why, yes."

"Skovorodnikov?"

"Who else?"

"Where is he?"

"In Moscow," Sanya said.

I was amazed.

"Has he been there long?"

"Ever since you two ran away."

Pyotr in Moscow! I couldn't believe my ears.

"But, Sanya, I live in Moscow myself!"

"No?"

"Yes, really. How is he, what's he doing?"

"He's all right. He's finishing school this year."

"The devil he is! I'm finishing too. Have you got any photos of him?"

I thought Sanya was somewhat embarrassed when I asked for a photo of him. She said: "In a minute" and went out, returning almost immediately, as if she had taken Pyotr's photo out of her pocket.

"My, isn't he handsome," I said and started laughing. "Ginger?"

"Yes."

"Gee, isn't it grand! And the old man? How's the old man? Is it true?"

"Is what true?"

"That he's a judge?"

"Why, he's been a judge these last five years."

We kept asking questions and interrupting each other and asking more questions. We started the samovar going and made up the stove, and then the bell tinkled in the hall.

"Aunt Dasha!"

"You stay here," Sanya whispered. "I'll break the news to her. She has a heart condition, you know."

She went out and I heard the following conversation in the next room.

"Now don't get excited, Aunt Dasha, please. I have very good news so there's no need to be upset."

"Well, out with it then!"

"You decided not to bake any pies today, Aunt Dasha, but you'll have to."

"Pyotr has arrived?"

"That would be nice too, but no, it's not Pyotr. You won't get excited, Aunt Dasha, will you?"

"I won't."

"Honestly?"

"Drat the girl! Honestly."

"That's who's come!" Sanya announced, throwing open the kitchen door.

The remarkable thing is that Aunt Dasha recognised me at first glance.

"Sanya," she said quietly.

She embraced me. Then she sat down and closed her eyes. I took her hand.

"My darling boy! Alive? Where have you been? We've been searching the world for you."

"I know, Aunt Dasha. It's all my fault."

"His fault! Good heavens! He comes back and talks about his fault! Dear, dear boy. What a bonny lad you've grown! And so handsome!"

Aunt Dasha had always thought me a good looker.

Then the judge came in. The guard had been right—the old man had shaved off his moustache. He looked ten years younger and it was now hard to believe that he had once boiled skin-glue and built such hopes upon it.

He knew that I had come back, as Sanya had telephoned him.

"Well, prodigal son," he said, hugging me. "Aren't you afraid I'll have your head off, you rascal, you?"

What could I say for myself? I only grunted penitently.

Later that night he and I were left alone. The old man wanted to know what I had been doing and how I had been living since I had left the town. Like the judge he was, he questioned me rigorously about all my affairs, school and private.

I told him I wanted to be an airman, and he gazed at me long and steadily from under his bushy eyebrows.

"The air force?"

"An Arctic pilot. In the air force, if necessary."

"A dangerous, but interesting job," he said after a pause.

One thing I didn't tell him, though that I had come to Ensk in the wake of Katya. I couldn't bring myself to tell him that if it hadn't been for Katya it would very likely be a long time before I came back to my home town, to my home.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE OLD LETTERS

I slept until eleven. Sanya had gone a long time ago, the old man was at work and Aunt Dasha had already put the dinner on, as she informed me.

While I drank my tea she kept making horrified comments on how little I was eating.

"So that's how they feed you!" she said tartly. "The gypsy fed his horse better, and that croaked."

"You know, Aunt Dasha, I was looking for you at the old place. The houses have been pulled down I see?"

"Yes," Aunt Dasha said with a sigh.

"Aunt Dasha, do you know the Bubenchikovs?"

The Bubenchikovs were relations of Nina Kapitonovna, and I had no doubt that Katya had gone to them.

"The people who were pronounced? Who doesn't know them?"

"Pronounced?"

"The priest pronounced the ban on them," said Aunt Dasha. "They sent him packing, so he pronounced 'em. That was a long time ago, before the Revolution. You were a little boy then. Why do you ask?"

"People in Moscow asked me to give them their regards," I lied.

Aunt Dasha shook her head doubtfully.

"Ah, I see..."

I asked Aunt Dasha for an envelope and some paper and sat down to write a letter. "I'll write to Katya and Sanya will deliver it."

"Katya," I wrote. "As you see, I am back in Ensk, and I'm dying to see you. Come down to Cathedral Gardens at four. This note will be delivered to you—guess by whom? By my sister. A. Grigoriev."

"Aunt Dasha, Pyotr used to have some interesting books. Where are they? Where do you keep books, anyway?"

Pyotr's books were discovered in Sanya's room, on a bric-a-brac stand. Evidently no great store was set by them, because they stood on the bottom shelf among all sorts of junk. I felt a bit sad when I picked up *The Ghastly Night or the Most Marvellous Adventures of a Don Cossack in the Caucasus Mountains.* Dammit, what a wretch of a little fellow I was then!

A package wrapped in a yellowed newspaper dropped on the floor during my energetic search for *A Guide To Letter Writing*. It was the batch of old letters. I recognised them immediately. They were letters which the river had one day washed up into our yard in a post bag. Those long winter evenings, when Aunt Dasha used to read them to us, came back to me. How wonderful, how delightful those readings had seemed to me!

Other people's letters! And who knows where these people now were? This letter, for instance, in its thick yellowed envelope. Maybe somebody had not slept nights, waiting for it?

Mechanically I opened the envelope and read several lines:

"Dear Maria Vasilievna,

"I hasten to inform you that Ivan Lvovich is alive and well. Four months ago, on his orders, I left the schooner along with thirteen of the crew..."

I read on and could not believe my eyes. It was the letter of the navigating officer, which I used to know by heart and which I had recited on the trains on my way to Moscow! But it was not this that struck me.

"The *St. Maria,"* I read on, "became icebound in the Kara Sea and since October 1912 has been drifting steadily north with the Arctic icefields."

The *St. Maria'*. Why, that was the name of Captain Tatarinov's schooner! I turned back the sheet and read the letter again.

"Dear Maria Vasilievna"—Maria Vasilievna! I hasten to inform you that Ivan Lvovich..." Ivan Lvovich! Katya was called Katerina Ivanovna—the patronymic was from the name Ivan!

Aunt Dasha decided that I had gone crazy, because I suddenly emitted a yell and started frantically to search among the old letters.

I knew what I was after, though. Aunt Dasha had once read to me another of those letters describing the life amid the icefloes and about the sailor who had fallen to his death and how they had to chop the ice away in the cabins.

"Aunt Dasha, are they all here?" "Goodness gracious, what's happened?"

"Nothing, Aunt Dasha. There should be one particular letter here." I didn't hear myself speak. Ah, here it was! "My darling, my own dear, sweet Maria,

"It's nearly now two years since I sent you a letter through the telegraph dispatch office on Yugorsky Shar. And what a lot of changes ' there have been since then, I can't tell you! To begin with, we were standing on a

straight set course, but since October 1912 have been drifting slowly north with the Arctic ice. Willy-nilly, we had to abandon our original plan of making Vladivostok along the coast of Siberia. But this proved to be a blessing in disguise. It has given me quite a new idea. I hope it does not strike you, as it does some of my companions, as childish or foolhardy..."

The first sheet ended here. I turned it over, but could make out nothing except a few disconnected words which stood out amid the smudges and stains.

The second sheet started with a description of the schooner:

"...in some places reaching a considerable depth. Amid one such icefield stands our *St. Maria* snowed up to the gunwale. At times a garland of hoarfrost breaks off the rigging and comes down with a soft swishing sound. As you see, dear Maria, I've become a poet. We have a real poet on board, though—our cook Kolpakov. A cheerful soul! He goes about all day long singing his poem. Here are four lines from it for a keepsake:

Under the flag of Mother Russia,

In the good ship Saint Maria,

We shall sail the Siberian coast along

With our Captain brave and strong.

"I read this endless letter of mine over and over again, and find that I am simply gossiping when I have so many important things to tell you. I am sending with Klimov a packet addressed to the head of the Hydrographical Board, containing my observations, official letters and a report giving the story of our drift. Just in case, I am writing you, too, about our discovery: north of the Taimyr Peninsula the map shows no land whatever. But situated in latitude 79°35', between meridians 86 and 87 east of Greenwich, we observed a sharply defined silvery strip, slightly convex, running out from the very horizon. On April 3rd this strip became an opaque patch of moonlight, and the next day we saw clouds of a very queer shape, resembling a mist enveloping distant mountains. I am convinced that this is land. Unfortunately, I couldn't leave the ship in her present plight in order to explore it. But its turn will come. Meantime, I have named it after you, so now you will find on every map a heartfelt greeting from your..."

Here ended the reverse side of the second sheet. I laid it aside and started on the third. The first few lines were washed away. Then came:

"It's galling to think that everything could have turned out differently. I know he will try to put himself right with you, perhaps he will even persuade you that it is all my own/fault. One thing I beg of you: do not trust that man. It can positively be said that we owe all our misfortunes to him alone. Suffice it to say that most of the sixty dogs he sold to us at Archangel had to be shot while we were still at Novaya Zemlya. That's the price we had to pay for that good office. Not I alone, but the whole expedition send him our curses. We were taking a chance, we knew that we were running a risk, but we did not expect such a blow. It remains for us to do all we can. What a lot I could tell you about our voyage! Stories enough to last Katya a whole winter. But what a price we are

having to pay, good God! I don't want you to think that our plight is hopeless. Still, you shouldn't look forward too much..."

Like a flash of lightning in a forest that suddenly illumines everything around and transforms the dark scene so that you can even make out the leaves on a tree which a moment before had worn the shape of a beast or a giant, the whole thing dawned on me as I read these lines. Even trivial details which I never thought I could remember came back to me.

I understood Nikolai Antonich's hypocritical speeches about his "poor cousin". I understood that false solemnity of expression he wore when speaking about his cousin, the pucker between his brows deepening as though you, too, were partly to blame for what had happened. The full depth of the man's baseness, the show he made of being proud of his own nobility, were brought home to me. He had not been named in the letter, but that it was he who was meant I did not have the slightest doubt.

My throat went dry through excitement and I was talking to myself so loudly that Aunt Dasha was seriously alarmed. "Sanya, what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing, Aunt Dasha. Where do you keep the rest of these old letters?"

"They're all there."

"That can't be! Don't you remember reading me this letter once? It was a long one, on eight sheets."

"I don't remember, dear."

I found nothing more in the packet-only these three sheets out of the eight. But they were enough!

I changed the "come at four" in Katya's letter to "come at three", then to "come at two". But as it was already two o'clock I changed it back to three.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A RENDEZVOUS IN CATHEDRAL GARDENS.

"DO NOT TRUST THA T MAN"

I had been to Cathedral Gardens a thousand times as a boy, but it had never struck me then as being such a beautiful place. It stood high on a hill overlooking the confluence of two rivers—the Peschinka and the Tikhaya, and was surrounded by the old ramparts. These were in an excellent state of preservation, but the towers seemed to have shrunk since Pyotr and I had last met there to take the "blood-oath of friendship".

At last they came-Katya and Sanya. I saw Sanya, wrapped in an old-womanish, yellow sheepskin coat, wave her hand around as much as to say, "this is Cathedral Gardens", and immediately take her leave with a mysterious nod of the head. "Katya!" I cried. She started, saw me and laughed.

We spent half an hour scolding each other: I her for not having told me she was going away, and she me, for not having waited for her letter before coming. Then we both recollected that we had not spoken to each other about the most important thing of all. It appeared that Nikolai Antonich had had a talk with Katya. "In the name of my poor cousin" he had forbidden her to see me. He had delivered a long speech and wept.

"Believe me or not, Sanya," Katya said gravely, "but I saw it with my own eyes, honestly!"

"Well, well," I said and placed my hand on my chest.

There, in my breast pocket, wrapped in a piece of lint which I had got from Aunt Dasha, lay Captain Tatarinov's letter.

"Listen, Katya," I began on a firm note, "I want to tell you a story. It's like this. Imagine that you're living on the bank of a river and one fine day a postman's bag turns up on this bank. It hasn't dropped from the skies, of course, it's been washed up by the water. The postman drowned. And his bag falls into the hands of a woman who's very fond of reading. And this woman has a boy of eight among her neighbours who's very fond of listening. So one day she reads him a letter which begins 'Dear Maria Vasilievna'."

Katya looked up at me, startled.

" 'I hasten to inform you that Ivan Lvovich is alive and well," I went on quickly. "Four months ago, on his orders...' " :.

I recited the letter of the navigating officer in a single breath. I did not stop once, though Katya clutched my sleeve several times in horror and amazement.

"Did you see this letter?" she asked, her face white. "He was writing about Father?" she asked again, as though there could be any doubt about it.

"Yes. But that's not all."



And I told her how Aunt Dasha had one day come upon another letter describing life aboard an icebound ship which was slowly drifting north.

" 'My darling, my own dear, sweet Maria,' " I began reciting from memory, then stopped.

A cold shiver ran up my spine and a choking sensation gripped my throat as I suddenly saw before me, as in a dream, the bleak, prematurely aged face of Maria Vasilievna, her brows puckered in gloom. She had been about the same age as Katya was now when he wrote her that letter, and Katya was a little girl always waiting for "a letter from Daddy". That letter had come at last!

"Here it is," I said, drawing it from my breast pocket wrapped up in the piece of lint. "Sit down and read it. I'll go away and come back when you've finished."

Needless to say, I didn't go anywhere. I stood under the tower of St. Martin and watched Katya all the time while she was reading. I felt very sorry for her and warm inside whenever I thought about her, but cold when I thought how dreadful it must be for her to read those letters. I saw her push her hair back with an unconscious gesture when it got into her eyes, then stand up as if trying to make out some difficult word. I wasn't sure till then whether it was a joy or sorrow to get a letter like that. But looking at her now, I realised what grief, what terrible grief it

was. I realised that she had never given up hope. Thirteen years ago her father had disappeared in the icy wastes of the Arctic, a thing that could only mean death from cold and starvation. But for her he had died only that day!

When I went back to her, Katya's eyes were red and she was sitting on the garden seat with her hands in her lap, holding the letters.

"Not feeling cold?" I asked, at a loss for words.

"I haven't been able to make out some words... Here: 'I beg of you...

"Ah, that! It reads: 'I beg of you, do not trust that man.' "

Katya called on us that evening, but we did not speak about the old letters—we had agreed on that beforehand. Katya was very sad. Everyone was nice to her, especially Sanya, who had become attached to her immediately as only girls know how. Afterwards Sanya and I saw her home.

The old folks were still up when we got back. The judge, somewhat belatedly, was scolding Aunt Dasha for not having delivered that mail—"at least those letters where the address could be made out"— and could find only one extenuating circumstance: that it had happened ten years ago. Aunt Dasha was talking about Katya. My fate, she thought, was decided.

"I think she's very nice," she said, sighing. "Beautiful and sad. Healthy girl."

I asked Sanya for the map of the Soviet North and showed her the route which Captain Tatarinov was to have taken from Leningrad to Vladivostok. Only then did I remind myself of his discovery. What land could that be lying north of the Taimyr Peninsula? "Why, that must be Severnaya Zemlya!" Sanya said. What the devil! It was Severnaya Zemlya (Northern Land) discovered in 1913 by Lieutenant Vilkitsky. Latitude 79°35,' between 86 and 87 longitude. Very strange!

"Hold on!" I said, and must have gone a bit pale, because Aunt Dasha looked at me anxiously. "I've got it! First it was a silvery strip running out from the very horizon. On April 3rd the strip became an opaque patch. April 3rd!"

"Sanya," Aunt Dasha began in alarm.

"Hold on! April 3rd. Now Vilkitsky discovered Severnaya Zemlya in the autumn, I don't remember when, but it was in the autumn, some time in September or October. In the autumn, six months later! That's to say he discovered nothing at all, dammit, because it had already been discovered."

"Sanya!" It was the judge speaking now.

"Discovered and named after Maria Vasilievna," I went on, pressing my finger hard on Severnaya Zemlya as though afraid there might be some other mistake about it. "Named after Maria Vasilievna. Maria Land, or something like that. Now sit down and I'll explain it all to you."

Talk about sleep after a day like that! I drank water and studied the map. The dining-room was hung with pictures of the town, and I studied them, too, for a long time without realising that they were Sanya's paintings and that she was studying painting and dreamt of going to the Academy of Arts. I looked at the map again. I recollected that the name Severnaya Zemlya had been given to these islands only recently and that Vilkitsky had named them Nicholas II Land.

Poor Captain Tatarinov! He had been surprisingly, extraordinarily unlucky. There was not a single mention of him in any geography book and nobody in the world knew what he had done.

I felt a cold shiver of pity and rapture, and went to bed, as it had gone five and from outside in the street came the sounds of a sweeping broom. But I couldn't fall asleep. Disjointed phrases from the Captain's letter haunted me, and I could hear Aunt Dasha's voice reading the letter and see her peering over her spectacles, sighing and faltering. I recollected a scene, which had once presented itself to my imagination-a scene of white tents in the snow, huskies harnessed to sledges, a giant of a man in fur boots and a tall fur cap—and I wished that this had all happened to me, that I had been on board that ship which was slowly moving to her doom with the drifting ice and that I had been the Captain who wrote that farewell letter to his wife, and could not finish it. "I have named it after you, so now you will find on every map a heartfelt greeting from your..."

I wondered how that sentence ended? Then something slowly passed through my head, very slowly, almost reluctantly, and I sat' up in bed, half incredulous, feeling that in another minute I would go mad. Go mad remembering this: "greeting from your Mongotimo Hawk's Claw, as you used to call me. God, how long ago that was! I am not complaining , though..."

"I am not complaining, though," I repeated, muttering, fumbling and groping among my memories for some missing word. "I am not complaining. We shall see each other again and all will be well. But one thought, one thought torments me!"

I jumped up, switched on the light and rushed over to the table on which lay the pencils and maps.

"It's galling to think," I was now writing on one of the maps, "that everything could have turned out differently. Misfortunes dogged us, but our main misfortune was the mistake for which we are now having to pay every hour, every minute of the day-the mistake I made in entrusting the fitting out of our expedition to Nikolai." Nikolai? Was it Nikolai? Yes, it was!

I paused at this point; beyond it there was a sort of gap in my memory, and after that there had come something-I remembered that now quite clearly-something about a sailor named Skachkov, who had fallen into a crevasse and been crushed to death. But this was not the thing. This was the general context of the letter, not the actual text, of which I could recall nothing more, except a few disconnected words.

I got no sleep at all. The judge was up at eight and got a fright when he saw me sitting in my underwear over a map of the North, from which I had managed to read all the details of the ill-fated voyage of the *St. Maria*— details which would have astonished Captain Tatarinov himself had he returned.

We had arranged the previous evening to go to the town's museum. Sanya was keen on showing us this museum, which was the pride of Ensk. It was housed in an old mansion, once the residence of a rich merchant. On the second floor was an exhibition of paintings by Sanya's teacher, the artist Tuva, and she took us to see these first of all. The artist was there in person-a genial little man in a velvet blouse a la Tolstoy and with a mop of black hair in which gleamed thick grey strands. His paintings were not bad, though rather monotonous—all

Ensk and Ensk. Ensk by day and by night, in moonlight and sunlight, the old town and the new town. We praised them fulsomely, though—this Tuva was such a nice man and Sanya gazed at him with such adoration.

She must have guessed that Katya and I wanted to have a talk, because she suddenly excused herself and stayed behind on some trifling pretext, while we went downstairs into a large hall in which stood knights in chain-mail, which stuck out from under their breastplates like a shirt under a man's waistcoat.

Naturally, I was all eagerness to tell Katya about my nocturnal discoveries. She saved me the trouble of starting the conversation by starting it herself.

"Sanya," she said, when we stopped in front of a Stephen Bathori man-at-arms, who somehow reminded me of Korablev. "I've been thinking about who he meant in that phrase: 'Don't trust that man.' "

"Well?"

"I've come to the conclusion that it ... it's not him."

We were silent. She stared fixedly at the man-at-arms.

"But it *was* about him," I retorted grimly. "By the way, your father discovered Severnaya Zemlya. It was he, and not Vilkitsky at all. I've established the fact."

This news, which a few years later was to create a sensation among all the world's geographers, produced no effect whatever on Katya.

"What makes you think," she went on, speaking with an effort, "that it's he ... Nikolai Antonich? The letter doesn't say so, does it?"

"Oh, yes it does," I said, feeling that I was beginning to lose my temper. "For one thing, take those dogs. Who had boasted a thousand times that he had bought excellent dogs for the expedition? Secondly-"

"Secondly what?"

"Secondly, last night I recollected another passage from that letter. Here it is."

And I recited the passage which began with the words: "Mongotimo Hawk's Claw." I recited it loudly and distinctly, like poetry, and Katya listened to it wide-eyed, grave as a statue. Suddenly her eyes went cold and I thought that she didn't believe me.

"Don't you believe me?"

She paled and said quietly:

"I do."

We then dropped the subject. I only asked whether she remembered where "Mongotimo Hawk's Claw" came from, and she said she did not remember—Gustave Aimard, perhaps. Then she asked, did I realise how terrible this would be for her mother.

"All this is much worse than you think," she remarked sadly, just like a grown-up. "Life's very hard for Mother, not to mention what she's lived through. And Nikolai Antonich-"

Katya broke off. Then she explained to me what it was all about. This, too, was a discovery, no less surprising, perhaps, than Captain Tatarinov's discovery of Severnaya Zemlya. It appeared that Nikolai Antonich had been in love with Maria Vasilievna for many years. The year before, when she was ill, he slept, if he slept at all, in his clothes, and engaged a nurse, though this was quite unnecessary. When she got better he took her down to Sochi and fixed her up in the Hotel Riviera, though a sanatorium would have been much cheaper. In the spring he

had gone to Leningrad and brought back a very expensive fur jacket for Maria Vasilievna. He never went to bed if she was not at home. He persuaded her to give up the university, because it was hard for her to work and study at the same time. But the most surprising thing of all had happened that winter. All of a sudden Maria Vasilievna said she did not want to see him any more. And he disappeared. Went away in the clothes he stood in and did not come home for ten days. Where he had been living was a mystery-probably in a hotel room. At this point Nina Kapitonovna stood up for him. She said this was nothing short of an "inquisition", and fetched him home herself. But Maria Vasilievna did not speak to him for a whole month.

Nikolai Antonich madly in love—I couldn't imagine it! Nikolai Antonich with his stubby fingers and his gold tooth-and so old. Nevertheless, as Katya went on with her story, I could picture that complex and painful relationship. I could imagine what Maria Vasilievna's life had been, during those long years. Such a beautiful woman left stranded at twenty. "Neither widowed nor married." For the sake of her husband's memory she forced herself to live in her memories. I could imagine Nikolai Antonich courting her for years, suave, persistent, patient. He had succeeded in convincing her-and others too—that he alone understood and loved her husband. Katya was right. For Maria Vasilievna this letter would be a terrible blow. It would be better, perhaps, to leave it on the shelf in Sanya's room, between *Tsar Kolokol* and *The Adventures of a Don Cossack in the Caucasus.*

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

WE GO FOR WALKS.

I VISIT MOTHER'S GRAVE.

DAY OF DEPARTURE

The week I spent in Ensk was anything but a gay one. But then what wonderful memories it left me with for the rest of my life.

Katya and I went for walks every day. I showed her my favourite old spots and spoke about my childhood. I remember reading somewhere that archaeologists were able to reconstruct the history and customs of a whole people from a single preserved inscription. That's how it was with me, when, from the few surviving old nooks in my hometown, I reconstructed for Katya the story of my previous life.

I spent only one day away from Katya, the day I went to the cemetery. I expected to find no trace of Mother's grave after all those years. But I found it. It was enclosed in a broken-down wooden fence and you could still make out the inscription on the awry cross:
"Sacred to the memory of..." Of course, it was winter and all the graves were snowed up, yet you could tell at once that this was a neglected grave.
Saddened, I walked among the paths, calling up memories of my mother. How old would she have been now? Forty. Still quite a young woman. With a pang I thought how happily she could have been living now, the way Aunt Dasha, say, was living. I recollected her tired, heavy

glance, her hands corroded by washing, and how she could not eat anything of an evening because she was dead tired.

I found the keeper, who was chopping wood outside the tumbledown chapel.

"Granddad," I said to him, "you have here the grave of Aksinya Grigorieva. It's along this path here, the second from the corner." I think he was pretending when he said he knew the grave I was talking about.

"Couldn't it be tidied up? I'll pay for it." The keeper went down the path, looked at the grave and came back.

"That grave is being cared for," he said. "You can't see it because it's winter now. Some of the others aren't being cared for, but this one is."

I gave him three rubles and went away.

And then the last day came round, the day of parting. It found Aunt Dasha astir at six, busy baking pies. Smeared with flour, wearing her spectacles, she came into the dining-room where I was sleeping, the edge of an envelope between her fingers.

"Must wake Sanya up," she said. "Here's a letter from Pyotr. And so it was, brief, but "pertinent", as the judge put it. First, he explained why he had not come home for the holidays. It was because he had been visiting Leningrad with an excursion party. Secondly, he was astonished to hear that I had turned up and expressed himself feelingly on that point. Third, he went for me baldheaded for not having written, not having looked for him and generally for having "behaved like an unfeeling horse". Fourth, the envelope contained another letter, addressed to my sister, who laughed and said: "The silly fool, he could have just added a postscript." I don't suppose he could, though, because Sanya took the letter and sat reading it in her room for three full hours, until I came charging in demanding that she put a stop to Aunt Dasha, who was piling up a stack of pies for my journey.

The judge came home specially to have dinner with me for the last time. He brought a bottle of wine. We drank, and he made a speech. A jolly good speech it was too. He compared Pyotr and me to eagles and expressed the hope that we would return more than once to the nest.

We sat so long over dinner that we nearly missed the train. We drove to the station in cabs. I had never travelled so luxuriously before-sitting back in a cab with a hamper at my feet.

We arrived to find Katya standing on the carriage steps with the two old Bubenchikov aunts exhorting her not to catch cold during the journey, to keep an eye on her luggage, not to go out on the carriage platform, to wire them on arrival, remember them to everybody and not to forget to write.

My seat was in another carriage, so we merely bowed a greeting to Katya and the Bubenchikovs. Katya waved to us and the old ladies nodded primly.

The second bell. I embraced Sanya and Aunt Dasha. The judge reminded me to look up Pyotr and I gave my word of honour that I would call on him the day I arrived. I invited Sanya to come and see me in Moscow and she promised to come for her spring holidays-it appeared that she had already made arrangements about this with Pyotr.

The third bell. I was in the carriage. Sanya was writing something in the air and I wrote back at a guess: "Okay." Aunt Dasha began to cry

quietly and the last thing I saw was Sanya taking the handkerchief from her and, with a laugh, wiping away her tears. The train pulled out, and that dear old railway station slipped past me. We gathered speed. In another moment the platform came to an end. Goodbye, Ensk.

At the next station I changed places with an oldish gentleman, who found my lower berth more convenient for him, and moved into Katya's carriage. For one thing, it was more airy, for another it was Katya's.

She had quite settled in. On the little table lay a clean napkin and the window was curtained. You'd think she'd been living in that carriage a hundred years.

We had both only just had dinner, but we simply had to see what the old folks had put in our hampers. We had an apple each and treated our travelling companion to one. He was a little, unshaven, blue-black man in spectacles, who kept making guesses as to who we were: brother and sister-no, we didn't look like it. Husband and wife - too young.

It was some time past two in the morning and our unshaven companion was snoring his head off, while Katya and I were still standing in the corridor, chatting. We wrote with our fingers on the frozen panes-first initials, then the opening letters of words.

"Just like in *Anna Karenina,"* said Katya.

I didn't think it was like Anna Karenina or anything else for that matter.

Katya stood beside me and looked sort of new, different. She wore her hair in grown-up style, parted in the middle, and a surprisingly new ear peeped out from under her dark attractive hair. Her teeth, too, looked new when she smiled. Never before had she turned her head, when I began to speak, with that easy yet proud gesture of a beautiful woman. She was a new and entirely different girl, and I felt that I was terribly in love with her.

Suddenly, through the window, we could see the wires dipping and rising, and a dark field came into view covered with dark snow. I don't know at what speed the train was going-it could not have been more than forty kilometres an hour—but it seemed to me that we were rushing along at magical speed. The world lay before me. I did not know what it had in store for me. But I did know that this was forever, that Katya was mine and I hers for as long as we live.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

WHAT AWAITED ME IN MOSCOW

Imagine yourself returning to your home, in which you had spent half your life, to suddenly find yourself being stared at in surprise, as if you had come to the wrong place. That was what I experienced when I returned to school after visiting Ensk.

The first person I met, down in the cloakroom, was Romashka. He scowled when he saw me, then grinned.

"Hullo!" he said in a tone of malicious glee. "Tishoo! Bless you!"

The cad seemed very pleased.

None of the other boys were about-it was the last day before term began. Korablev passed down the corridor and I ran after him.

"Good morning, Ivan Pavlovich!"

"Ah, it's you!" he said gravely. "Come and see me, I want to speak to you."

The portrait of a young woman stood on Korablev's desk, and for the moment I did not recognise Maria Vasilievna—she was much too beautiful. She was wearing a coral necklace, the same one Katya had worn at our school ball. The sight of that necklace somehow bucked me up. It was like a greeting from Katya.

"Ivan Pavlovich, what's the matter?" I began.

"This is the matter," Korablev said slowly. "They're going to expel you from the school."

"What for?"

"Don't you know?" "I don't."

Korablev eyed me sternly. "I don't like that at all." "Honestly, I don't, Ivan Pavlovich."

"For nine days AWOL," he said, turning down one finger. "For insulting Likho. For fighting."

"I see! Very good," I said very calmly. "But before expelling me be so good as to hear me out." "Go ahead."

"Ivan Pavlovich," I began in a solemn tone, "you want to know why I socked Romashka one in his ugly mug?" "Leave the 'ugly mugs' out of it," Korablev said. "All right. I gave him one in his ugly mug because he's a cad. For one thing, he told the Tatarinovs about me and Katya. Secondly, he listens to what the boys say about Nikolai Antonich and narks on them. Third, I found him rummaging in my box. It was a regular search. The boys saw me catch him at it, and I hit him, it's true. I admit, it wasn't right to use my boot, but I'm only human after all. It was more than flesh and blood could stand. It might have happened to anybody."

"All right. Go on."

"As for Likho, you know about that already. Let him first prove that I am an idealist. Did you read my essay?" "Yes, it's bad."

"That may be, but there isn't a hint of idealism in it. You can take that from me." "All right. Go on." "That's all. What else is there?"

"What else? Do you know they have had the police searching for you?"

"Ivan Pavlovich... Well, that was wrong of me, perhaps. I did tell Valya, but I suppose that doesn't count. All right. But do you mean to say they're going to expel me because I went off on holiday-where do you think?-to my hometown where I haven't been for eight years?"

I knew there was going to be ructions when Korablev mentioned the police, and I wasn't mistaken. He went for me baldheaded, shouting at the top of his voice, and I could only slip in an occasional timid: "Ivan Pavlovich!" "Hold your tongue!"

And he would pause himself for a moment, but only to draw breath for a renewed attack.

It slowly dawned on me that I really had a lot to answer for. But would they really expel me? If they did, then all was lost. It was goodbye to flying school. Goodbye to life! Korablev stopped at last.

"Your behaviour has been outrageous!" he said.

"Ivan Pavlovich," I began in a voice that was croaky, rather than tremulous. "I'm not going to argue with you, though on many points you are not right. But never mind. You don't want them to expel me, do you?"

Korablev was silent, then he said: "And if I don't?"

"Then tell me what I have to do?"

"You must apologise to Likho."

"All right. But first let him-"

"I've spoken to him!" Korablev interrupted with annoyance. "He's crossed out the 'idealism'. But the mark remains the same. Secondly, you must apologise to Romashka too."

"Never!"

"But you admitted yourself that it wasn't right."

"All the same. You can expel me, but I won't apologise to him."

"Look here, Sanya," Korablev said gravely, "I had great difficulty in persuading them to call you before a meeting of the Teachers' Council. But now I'm beginning to regret taking all that trouble. If you come there and start saying your 'Never! You can expel me!' they'll expel you for certain. You may be sure of that."

He laid special emphasis on these words and I understood from his expression whom he had in mind. Nikolai Antonich immediately appeared before me, suave, smooth-spoken and verbose. That one would do everything to get me expelled.

"I don't think you have the right to risk your whole future through petty vanity."

"It isn't petty vanity, it's a point of honour!" I said warmly. "Would you have me hush up this Romashka affair just because it affects Nikolai Antonich, who has the power to decide whether I'm to be expelled or not? Would you have me act so meanly? Never! I know why he'll insist on having me expelled. He wants to get rid of me, wants me to go away somewhere so's not to meet Katya. Not likely! I'll tell them everything at the Teachers' Council. I'll tell them that Romashka is a cad and only a cad would apologise to him." Korablev became thoughtful.

"Wait a minute," he said. "You say Romashov eavesdrops on the boys and then reports to Nikolai Antonich what they say about him. But how can you prove it?" "I have a witness—Valya." "Valya whom?" "Zhukov."

"H'm that's interesting," Korablev said. "Why has Valya kept quiet about this? He's your chum, isn't he?"

"Romashka has some influence over him. He looks at him at night, and Valya can't stand it. Besides, he made Valya give his word of honour he would not babble about what Romashka had told him. Valya's a fool, of course, to have given his word of honour, but once he's given it he must keep his mouth shut. Isn't that so?"

Korablev stood up. He paced the room, took out a comb and tidied his moustache, then his eyebrows, and then his moustache again. He was thinking. My heart hammered, but I did not say another word. I let him think. I even breathed more quietly so's not to distract him.

"Very well, Sanya. You're not schooled in cunning, anyway," Korablev said at last. "Put the thing to the Teachers' Council exactly the way you have told me. But on one condition—"

"What's that, Ivan Pavlovich?"

"That you keep cool. You just said, for instance, that Nikolai Antonich wants to get you expelled because of Katya. You shouldn't say that at the Council meeting."

"Ivan Pavlovich, what do you take me for? Don't I understand?"

"You understand, all right, but you get too excited. I tell you what, Sanya, let's make this arrangement. I'll keep my hand on the table like this, palm downwards, and you'll keep your eye on it as you speak. If I start drumming the table, that means you're getting excited. If I don't, you aren't."

"All right, Ivan Pavlovich. Thank you. When's the meeting?"

"Today at three. But they'll call you in a bit later."

He asked me to send Valya to him and we parted.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

I BURN MY BOATS

It was an ordinary meeting in our small teachers' room, at a table covered with a blue cloth with ragged tassels. But it seemed to me that they were all looking at me with a sort of enigmatic, meaningful expression. Korablev gave a laugh when I came in, and I thought:
"That's on purpose."

"Well, Grigoriev," Nikolai Antonich began in a mild tone, "you know, of course, why we have called you to this meeting. You have distressed us, and not only us, but, I may say, the whole school. Distress us by your wanton behaviour, which is unworthy of the human society in which we live, and to whose development we must contribute to the best of our ability and powers."

I said:

"Please put your questions."

"Allow me, please, Nikolai Antonich," Korablev put in quickly. "Grigoriev, tell us please where you spent the nine days since you ran away from school?"

"I did not run away, I went to Ensk," I said calmly. "My sister lives there and I haven't seen her for eight years. Judge Skovorodnikov can confirm this-I stayed with him: 13, Gogolevskaya Street, formerly the Marcouse Mansion."

If I had said frankly that I had spent those nine days with Katya Tatarinova, who had been sent away to keep us from meeting each other at least during the holidays, my words could not have had a more disconcerting effect on Nikolai Antonich. He paled, blinked and cocked his head sharply to one side.

"Why didn't you tell anybody you were going away?" Korablev asked.

I admitted that I was guilty of a breach of discipline and promised that it would never happen again.

"Excellent, Grigoriev," said Nikolai Antonich. "Now that is an excellent answer. It remains for us to hope that you will have just as satisfactory explanations for your other actions."
He looked at me affectionately. His composure was marvellous! "Now tell us what happened between you and Mr Likho." To this day I can't understand why, in telling the story of my relations with Likho, I did not mention a word about "idealism". It may have been because I considered that since Likho had withdrawn his accusation there was nothing to talk about. This was a bad mistake. Besides, I should not have mentioned that I wrote my essays without referring to the "critics". It did not go down well. Korablev frowned and laid his hand on the table.

"So you don't like the critics?" Nikolai Antonich said dryly. "What did you say to Mr Likho? Please repeat it word for word."

Repeat to the Teachers' Council what I had said to Likho? Impossible! If Likho had not been such a fathead he would have intervened at this point to have this question withdrawn. But he just stared at me with an air of triumph. "Well," Nikolai Antonich prompted.

"Nikolai Antonich, allow me," Korablev interposed. "We know what he said to Mr Likho. We'd like to know what explanation he gives to his conduct."

"I beg your pardon!" said Likho. "I insist that he repeat what he said! I never heard such things even from the defectives at the Dostoyevsky School."

I was silent. Had I been able to read thoughts at a distance, I would have read in Korablev's eyes: "Sanya, tell them he accused you of 'idealism'."
"Well!" Nikolai Antonich repeated indulgently. "I don't remember," I muttered.

It was silly, because everybody saw at once that I was lying. Likho snorted.

"Today he insults me for giving him a bad mark, tomorrow he'll cut my throat," he said. "What hooliganism!"

I felt like giving him a punch on the nose, like I had very nearly done that time on the stairs, but I didn't, of course. I clenched my teeth and stared at Korablev's hand. He was drumming lightly on the table.

"It was a bad essay, I admit," I said, trying to keep cool and thinking with hatred how to extricate myself from this stupid position. "It may not have earned an 'extremely feeble' mark, because there isn't such a mark, but it wasn't up to the mark, I admit. Anyway, if the Council decides that I ought to apologise, then I'll apologise."

Obviously, this was another silly thing to say. All started talking together, saying God knows what, and Korablev eyed me with unconcealed annoyance.

"Yes, Grigoriev," Nikolai Antonich said with a deprecating smile. "So you are ready to apologise to Mr Likho only if the Council takes a decision to that effect. In other words, you don't feel guilty. Ah, well! We'll make a note of that and pass to the next question."

"Risk your whole future through petty vanity," the words came back to me.

"I apologise," I said awkwardly, turning to Likho. But Nikolai Antonich was speaking again, and Likho made out as if he had not heard me.

"Now this vicious attack on Romashov. You kicked him in the face, Grigoriev, inflicting serious injuries, which have noticeably affected the health of your comrade Romashov. How do you explain this conduct, the like of which has never been heard of within the walls of our school?"

I think I hated him more than ever at that moment for the smooth meandering way he spoke. But Korablev's fingers rose warningly above the table and I kept my temper.

"For one thing, I don't consider Romashov a comrade of mine. Secondly, I hit him only once. Thirdly, he doesn't show any sign of impaired health."

This roused a storm of indignation, but Korablev nodded his head ever so slightly.

"My conduct can be explained in this way," I proceeded more calmly. "I consider Romashov a cad and can prove it at any time. Instead of a beating, we should try him by a court of honour and have the whole school attend the trial."

Nikolai Antonich wanted to stop me, but I plunged on.

"I affirm that Romashov is influencing the weaker boys psychologically, trying to get a hold on them. If you want an example I can give it to you—Valya Zhukov. Romashov takes advantage of the fact that Valya is nervous and scares the life out of him. What does he do? First he gets him to give his word of honour to keep mum, then tells him all his low-down secrets. I was simply amazed when I heard about it. A Komsomol boy who gives his word not to tell anybody anything-about what? About what he hasn't heard yet himself! What do you call that? And that's not all!"

Korablev had been drumming the table for some time, but I was no longer worrying whether I was excited or not. I don't think I was a bit excited.

"And that's not all! Now I ask you," I said loudly, turning to Nikolai Antonich, "could such a person as Romashov exist in our school if he did not have protectors? He could not. And he does have them! At least, I know one of them—Nikolai Antonich!"

Spoken like a man! I never thought I'd had it in me to tell him this straight to his face! The room was silent, the whole Council waiting to see what would happen. Nikolai Antonich gave a laugh and paled. He always did go a bit pale when he laughed.

"Can this be proved? Easy as anything. Nikolai Antonich has always been interested in what they say about him in the school. I don't know why he should be. The fact remains that he hired Romashov for this purpose. I say 'hired' because Romashov never does anything for nothing. He hired him, and Romashov started eavesdropping on the boys and reporting to Nikolai Antonich what they said about him, and afterwards he gets Zhukov to give him his word of honour not to blab and tells him all about his talebearing. You may ask me—why did you keep silent if you knew about this? I got to know this just before I went away, and Zhukov promised me to write to the Komsomol Group about it, but he's only done that today."

I stopped speaking. Korablev removed his hand from the table and turned to Nikolai Antonich with a look of interest. He was the only one, by the way, who bore himself with ease. The other teachers looked embarrassed.

"Have you finished your explanations, Grigoriev?" said Nikolai Antonich in a level voice, as though nothing had happened.

"Yes."

"Are there any questions?"

"Nikolai Antonich," said Korablev in a courteous tone, "I believe we can dismiss Grigoriev. Don't you think we ought to invite Zhukov or Romashov in now?"

Nikolai Antonich undid the top button of his waistcoat and placed his hand over his heart. He had gone paler still and a strand of hair combed back over his head suddenly came loose and tumbled over his forehead. He fell back in his chair and closed his eyes. Everyone rushed over to him. So ended the meeting.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

AN OLD FRIEND

My speech at the Teachers' Council was the talk of the school, and I found myself a very busy man. To say that I felt a hero would be an exaggeration. Nevertheless, the girls from other classes came to look at me and commented audibly on my appearance. For the first time in my life my short stature was overlooked.

I was therefore disagreeably surprised when, at the height of my glory, the Komsomol Group passed on me a severe reprimand and warning. The Teachers' Council was not meeting owing to Nikolai Antonich's illness, but Korablev said that they might decide to transfer me to another school.

This did not make pleasant hearing, and what's more, it was unfair. I had nothing to say against the Group's decision. But to have me transferred to another school! For what? For having shown up Romashka for the cad he was? For having shown up Nikolai Antonich, who was his protector? I was in such a cheerless mood that, sitting in the library, I heard a loud whisper in the doorway: "Which one?" • I looked up to see a tall young fellow with a mop of red hair eyeing me questioningly from the doorway. Red-haired people always cultivate shocks of hair, but this chap's had a wild sort of look, like those you see on primitive man in your geography textbook. I leapt to my feet and rushed towards him, overthrowing a chair.

"Pyotr!"

We pumped each other's hands, then, on second thoughts, embraced.

He was very much like his photograph, which Sanya had shown me, except that on the photograph his hair was smoothed down. Was I glad! I did not feel the slightest embarrassment—it was like meeting my own brother.

"Pyotr! This is a surprise! Gee, I'm glad to see you!"

He laughed.

"I thought you were living in Turkestan. Didn't you make it?"

"What about you?"

"I did," said Pyotr. "But I didn't like it. Much too hot out there, you feel thirsty all the time. I was run in, got fed up and came back. You'd have kicked the bucket there."

We put on our coats and started down the stairs, talking away all the time. And here a very strange encounter took place.

On the landing outside the geography room stood a woman in a coat with a squirrel collar. She was standing by the banisters looking down the well of the staircase-for a moment I thought she was going to throw herself down the well, because she swayed by the banisters with her eyes closed. We must have frightened her, and she moved uncertainly towards the door. It was Maria Vasilievna. I recognised her at once, though she was in an unfamiliar guise. Perhaps, if I had been alone, she would have spoken to me. But I was with Pyotr, so she just nodded to me in response to my awkward bow and turned away.

She had grown thinner since I last saw her and her face was mask-like and sombre. With this thought in my mind I went out into the street, and Pyotr and I went for a walk together-just the two of us again, again in winter, again in Moscow, after a long separation.

"Remember?" we kept saying, as we dug up old memories, walking very quickly for some reason. It was snowing and there were lots of children on the boulevards. One young nursemaid looked at us and laughed.

"Hey, what are we running like this for?" said Pyotr, and we slowed down.

"Pyotr, I've got a proposal," I said, when, having walked our fill, we were sitting in a cafe in Tverskaya.

"Go ahead!"

"I'm going to make a phone-call, and you sit here, drink your coffee and say nothing."

The telephone was some distance from our table, right near the entrance, and I deliberately spoke loudly.

"Katya, I'd like you to meet a friend. Can you come along? What are you doing? By the way, I want to speak with you."

"So do I. I'd come, but everybody's ill here." She sounded sad and I felt a sudden urgent desire to see her.

"What do you mean, everybody? I've just seen Maria Vasilievna."

"Where?"

"She was calling on Korablev."

"Ah," Katya said in a rather odd voice. "No, Grandma's ill. Sanya, I gave Mother those letters," she added in a whisper, and I involuntarily pressed the receiver closer to my ear. "I told her that we had met in Ensk and then I gave it to her."

"And how did she take it?" I asked, also in a whisper.

"Very badly. I'll tell you later. Very badly."

She fell silent and I could hear her breathing through the telephone. We said goodbye and I returned to the table with a sense of guilt. I felt dejected and uneasy, and Pyotr seemed to guess my state of mind.

"I say," he began, deliberately going off on a new tack, "did you discuss this flying school plan of yours with Father?"

"Yes."

"What does he say?"

"He approves."

Pyotr sat with his long legs stretched out, thoughtfully fingering the places where a beard and moustache would be growing in the course of time.

"I must talk things over with him too," he murmured. "You see, last year I wanted to enter the Academy of Arts."

"Well?"

"But this year I've changed my mind."

"Why?"

"I may not have the talent for it."

I started laughing. But he looked serious and worried.

"Well, if you'd like to know, I think it strange, your wanting to go in for art. I always thought of you as becoming an explorer, say, or a sea captain."

"That's more interesting, of course," Pyotr said irresolutely. "But I like painting."

"Have you shown your work to anybody?"

"Yes, to X-."

He gave the name of a well-known painter.

"Well?"

"He says it's not bad."

"That settles it, then! It would be cockeyed if you, with your talent, were to go to some flying school or other! You may be ruining a future Repin in you."

"Oh, I don't know."

"I'm not so sure."

"You're kidding," Pyotr said with annoyance. "This is a serious matter."

We left the cafe, and wandered about Tverskaya for half an hour, talking about everything under the sun, switching from our Ensk to Shanghai, which had just been captured by the People's Army, from Shanghai to Moscow, to my school, from my school to Pyotr's, trying to impress upon each other that we were not living in this world just any old how, but with a philosophical purpose...

CHAPTER NINETEEN

IT COULD ALL HAVE BEEN DIFFERENT

Gone were those remote times when, coming in after ten o'clock, we had, with fast-beating heart, to sidle round the fearsome Japhet, who, clad in his huge sheepskin coat, sat on a stool at the entrance and slept—if you were lucky to find him asleep. But now I was in my last year and could come in whenever I liked.

It wasn't very late, though—round about twelve. The boys were still chatting. Valya was writing something, sitting on his bed with his legs tucked under him.

"I say, Sanya, Korablev wants to see you," he said. "That's if you came in before twelve. What's the time now?"

"Half past eleven."

"Hurry up!"

I slipped into my overcoat and ran off to see Korablev.

Ours was a most extraordinary conversation, one that I shall never forget as long as I live, and I must describe it with perfect calm. I must keep calm, especially now, when so many years have passed. It could all have been different, of course. It could all have been different if I had but realised what every word of mine meant for her, if I had been able to foresee what would happen after our conversation. But there is no end of these "ifs" and there is nothing I can blame myself for. Here, then, is the conversation that took place.

When I came in I found Maria Vasilievna with Korablev. She had been sitting there all the evening. But she had come to see, not him, but me, and she said as much in her very first words.

She sat erect with a blank face, patting her hair from time to time with a slim hand. Wine and biscuits stood on the table, and Korablev kept refilling his glass while she only took one sip at hers. She kept smoking all the time and there was ash all over the place, even on her knees. She was wearing the familiar string of coral beads and gave little tugs at it several times as though it were strangling her. That's all.

"The navigating officer writes that he cannot risk sending this letter through the post," she said. "Yet both letters were in the same post-bag. How do you account for that?"

I said that I did not know. One would have to ask the officer about that, if he were still alive. She shook her head. "If he were alive!"

"Perhaps his relatives would know? And then, Maria Vasilievna," I said in a sudden flash of inspiration, "the navigating officer was picked up by Lieutenant Sedov's expedition. They would know. He told them everything, I'm sure of it." "Yes, maybe," she answered.

"And then there's that packet for the Hydrographical Board. If the navigating officer sent the letter through the post he probably sent that packet by the same mail. We must find that out." Maria Vasilievna again said: "Yes."

I paused. I had been speaking alone, and Korablev had not yet uttered a word.

"What were you doing in Ensk?" she asked me suddenly. "Have you relatives there?"

I said yes, I had. A sister.

"I love Ensk," she remarked, addressing herself to Korablev. "It's wonderful there. Such gardens! I've never been in any gardens since."

And suddenly she started talking about Ensk. She said she had three aunts living there who did not believe in God and were very proud of it, and one of them had graduated in philosophy at Heidelberg. I had never known her to talk so much. She sat there pale and beautiful, with shining eyes, smoking and smoking.

"Katya told me you remembered some more passages from this letter," she suddenly switched back from the subject of her aunts and hometown. "But I couldn't get her to tell me what it was." "Yes, I do remember them."

I was expecting her to ask me what they were, but she said nothing. It was as if she were afraid to hear them from me.

"Well, Sanya?" Korablev said in a brisk tone of voice that was obviously feigned.

"It ended like this," I said. " 'Greetings from you...' Is that right?"

Maria Vasilievna nodded.

"And it went on: '...from your Mongotimo Hawk's Claw...' "

"Mongotimo?" Korablev queried, astonished.

"Yes, Mongotimo," I repeated firmly.

"Montigomo Hawk's Claw," said Maria Vasilievna, and for the first time her voice shook slightly. "I used to call him that."

"Montigomo, if you say so," I said. "I remember it as Mongotimo... 'as you once called me. God, how long ago that was. I am not complaining, though. We shall see each other again and all will be well. But one thought, one thought torments me.' 'One thought' comes twice, it's not me repeating it, that's how it was in the letter."

Maria Vasilievna nodded again.

" 'It's galling to think,' " I went on, " 'that everything could have turned out differently. Misfortunes dogged us, but our main misfortune was the mistake for which we are now having to pay every hour, every minute of the day—the mistake I made in entrusting the fitting out of our expedition to Nikolai.' "

I may have overstressed the last word, because Maria Vasilievna, who had been very pale already, went still paler. She sat before us, now white as death, smoking and smoking. Then she said something that sounded very queer and made me think for the first time that she might be a bit mad. But I did not attach any importance to it, as I thought that Korablev, too, was a bit mad that evening. He, of all people, should have realised what was happening to her! But he had lost his head completely. I daresay he was picturing Maria Vasilievna marrying him the very next day.

"Nikolai Antonich fell ill after that meeting," she said to Korablev. "I wanted to call the doctor, but he wouldn't let me. I haven't spoken to him about these letters. He's upset as it is. I don't think I ought to just now—what do you say?"

She was crushed, confounded, but I still understood nothing.

"If that's the case I'll do it myself!" I retorted. "I'll send him a copy. Let him read it."

"Sanya!" Korablev cried, coming to himself.

"Excuse me, Ivan Pavlovich, but I'll have my say. I feel very strongly about this. It's a fact that the expedition ended in disaster through his fault. That's a historical fact. He is charged with a terrible crime. And I consider, if it comes to that, that Maria Vasilievna, as Captain Tatarinov's wife, ought to bring this accusation against him herself."

She wasn't Captain Tatarinov's wife, she was his widow. She was now the wife of Nikolai Antonich, and so would have to bring this accusation against her own husband. But I hadn't tumbled to this either.

"Sanya!" Korablev shouted again.

But I had already stopped. I had nothing more to say. Our conversation continued, though there was nothing more to talk about. I only said that the land mentioned in the letter was Severnaya Zemlya and that, consequently, Severnaya Zemlya had been discovered by Captain Tatarinov. All those geographical terms, "longitude", "latitude", sounded strange in that room at that hour. Korablev paced furiously up and down the room. Maria Vasilievna smoked incessantly, and the

stubs, pink from her lipstick, formed a small mound in the ashtray before her. She was motionless and calm, and only tugged feebly now and again at her coral necklace. How far away from her was that Severnaya Zemlya, lying between some meridians or other!

That was all. Taking leave of her, I began muttering something again, but Korablev advanced upon me with a stern frown and I found myself bundled out of the room.

CHAPTER TWENTY

MARIA VASILIEVNA

What surprised me more than anything was that Maria Vasilievna had not said a word about Katya. Katya and I had spent nine days together in Ensk, yet Maria Vasilievna never mentioned it.

This silence was suspicious, and it was on my mind that night until I fell asleep, and then again in the morning during Physics, Social Science and Literature. I thought about it after school, too, when I wandered aimlessly about the streets. I remember stopping in front of a billboard and mechanically reading the titles of the plays, when a girl suddenly came round the corner and crossed the street at a run. She was without a hat and wore nothing but a light dress with short sleeves—in such a frost! Perhaps that was why I did not immediately recognise her.

"Katya!"

She looked round but did not stop, and merely waved her hand. I overtook her.

"Why haven't you got your coat on, Katya? What's the matter?"

She wanted to say something, but her teeth were cluttering and she had to clench them and fight for self-control before being able to say:

"I'm going for a doctor. Mother's very ill."

"What is it?"

"I don't know. I think she's poisoned herself."

There are moments when life suddenly changes gear, and everything seems to gain momentum, speeding and changing faster than you can realise.

From the moment I heard the words: "I think she's poisoned herself, everything changed into high gear, and the words kept ringing in my head with frightful insistence.

We ran to one doctor in Pimenovsky Street, then to another doctor who lived over the former Hanzhonkov's cimena and burst into a quiet, tidy flat with dust-sheets over the furniture and were met by a surly old woman wearing what looked like another dark-blue dust-sheet.

She heard us out with a deprecating shake of the head and left the room. On her way out she took something off the table in case we might pinch it.

A few minutes later the doctor came in. He was a tubby pink-faced man with a close-cropped grey head and a cigar in his mouth.

"Well, young people?"

We told him what it was all about, gave him the address and ran out. In the street, without further ado, I made Katya put on my coat. Her hair had come undone and she pinned it up as we ran along. But one of her plaits came loose again and she angrily pushed it under the coat.

An ambulance was standing at the door and we stopped dead in our tracks at the sight. The ambulance men were coming down the stairs with a stretcher on which lay Maria Vasilievna.

Her uncovered face was as white as it had been at Korablev's the night before, only now it looked as if carved in ivory.

I drew back against the banisters to let the stretcher pass, and Katya, with a piteous murmur "Mummy!", walked alongside it. But Maria Vasilievna did not open her eyes, and did not stir. I realised that she was going to die.

Sick at heart I stood in the yard watching them push the stretcher into the ambulance. I saw the old lady tuck the blanket round Maria Vasilievna's feet with trembling hands, saw the steam coming from everyone's mouth, the ambulance man's, too, as he produced a book that had to be signed, and from Nikolai Antonich's as he peered painfully from under his glasses and signed it.

"Not here," the man said roughly with a gesture of annoyance, and put the book away into the big pocket of his white overall.

Katya ran home and returned in her own coat, leaving mine in the kitchen. She got into the ambulance. The doors closed on Maria Vasilievna, who lay there white and ghastly, and the ambulance, starting off with a jerk like an ordinary lorry, sped on its way to the casualty ward.

Nikolai Antonich and the old lady were left alone in the courtyard. For a time they stood there in silence. Then he turned and went inside, moving his feet mechanically as though he were afraid of falling. I had never seen him like that before.

The old lady asked me to meet the doctor and tell him he was not needed. I ran off and met him in Triumfalnaya Square, at a tobacconist kiosk. The doctor was buying a box of matches.

"Dead?" he asked.

I told him that she was not and that the ambulance had taken her to hospital and I could pay him if he wanted.

"No need, no need," the doctor said gruffly.

I went back to find the old lady sitting in the kitchen, weeping. Nikolai Antonich was no longer there—he had gone off to the hospital.

"Nina Kapitonovna," I said, "is there anything I can do for you?" She blew her nose and wept and blew her nose again. This went on for a long time while I stood and waited. At last she asked me to help her on with her coat and we took a tram to the hospital.

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

ONE IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT

That night, with the sense of speed still whistling as it were in my ears as I hurtled on, though I was lying in my bed in the dark, it dawned on me that Maria Vasilievna's decision to do away with herself had been made when sitting in Korablev's room the night before. That's why she had been so calm and had smoked such a lot and said such queer things. Her mind was on some mysterious track of its own, of which we knew nothing. Everything she said was tinctured by the decision she had come to. It was not me she had been asking questions, but herself, and she answered them herself.

Perhaps she had thought that I was mistaken and that it was somebody else the letter referred to. Perhaps she had been hoping that the passages which I had remembered and which Katya had deliberately kept from her, would not have the terrible import she feared. Perhaps she had been hoping that Nikolai Antonich, who had done so much for her late husband-so much that that alone was reason enough for marrying him—would turn out to be not so guilty and base as she feared.

And I? Look what I had done!

I went hot and cold all over. I flung back the blanket and took deep breaths to steady myself and think matters out calmly. I went over that conversation again. How clear it was to me now! It was as if each word was turning slowly round before me and I could now see its other, hidden side.

"I love Ensk. It's wonderful there. Such gardens!" It had been pleasant to her to recall her youth at that moment. She was taking farewell, as it were, of her hometown-now that she had made her decision.

"Montigomo Hawk's Claw - I used to call him that." Her voice had shaken, because nobody else knew she had called him that, and so it was undeniable proof that I had remembered the words right.

"I haven't spoken to him about these letters. He's upset as it is. I don't think I ought to just now—what do you say?" And these words, too, which had seemed so odd to me yesterday—how clear they were now! He was her husband, perhaps the closest person in the world to her. And she simply did not want to upset him, knowing that she had troubles enough in store for him.

I had forgotten all about my deep breathing and was sitting up in bed, thinking and thinking. She had wanted to say goodbye to Korablev as well—that was it! He loved her, too, maybe more than anybody else did. She had wanted to take leave of the life which they might have made a go of. I had always had a feeling that it was Korablev she cared for.

I should have been asleep long ago, seeing that I had a very serious term-test facing me the next day, and that it was anything but pleasant to brood over the happenings of that unhappy day.

I must have fallen asleep, but only for a minute. Suddenly a voice close at my side said quietly: "She's dead." I opened my eyes, but nobody was there, of course. I must have said it myself.

And so, against my will, I found myself recalling how Nina Kapitonovna and I had gone to the hospital together. I tried to go to sleep, but I couldn't drive the memories away.

We had sat on a big white seat next to some doors, and it was some time before I realised that the stretcher with Maria Vasilievna on it was in the next room so close to us.

And then an elderly nurse had come out and said: "You have come to see Tatarinova? You may go in." And she herself hastily put a white gown on the old lady and tied the strings.

A chill struck my heart, I understood at once that she must be in a bad way if you were allowed in without a special permission. My heart went cold again when the elderly nurse went up to another nurse, somewhat younger, who was registering patients, and in answer to a question of hers, said: "Goodness, no! Not a chance."

Then began a long wait. I gazed at the white door and imagined them all-Nikolai Antonich, the old lady and Katya-standing around the stretcher on which Maria Vasilievna lay. Then somebody came out, leaving the door ajar for a moment, and I saw that it was not like that at all. There was no longer any stretcher there, and something white with a dark head lay on a low couch with somebody in white kneeling in front of it. I also saw a bare arm hanging down from the couch, and then the door shut. After that came a thin hoarse scream, and the nurse who was registering patients stopped for a minute, then resumed her writing and explaining. I don't know why, but I realised at once that the scream was Nikolai Antonich's. In such a thin little voice! Like a child's.

The elderly nurse came out and, with a business-like air that was obviously affected, began talking to some young man who stood kneading his hat in his hands. She glanced at me—because I had come with Nina Kapitonovna—then looked away at once. And I realised that Maria Vasilievna was dead.

Afterwards I heard the nurse saying to someone: "Such a pity, a beautiful woman." It all seemed to be happening in a dream, and I'm not sure whether it was she who said it or somebody else, as Katya and the old lady came out of the room in which she had died.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

IT ISN'T HIM

Those were miserable days and I don't feel like dwelling on them, though I remember every conversation, every encounter, almost every thought. They were days which cast a large shadow, as it were, on my life.

Soon after Maria Vasilievna's funeral I sat down to work. It seemed to me that there was something like a sense of self-preservation in the fierce persistence with which I applied myself to my studies, thrusting all thoughts behind me. It was not easy, especially bearing in mind that when I went up to Katya at the funeral she turned away from me.

It happened like this. Unexpectedly, very many people came to the funeral-colleagues of Maria Vasilievna's and even students who had been at the Medical Institute with her. She had always seemed a lonely person, but apparently many people knew her and liked her. Among these strangers, all talking in whispers and gazing at the gateway, waiting for the coffin to be carried out, stood Korablev, hollow-eyed, his big moustache looking enormous on his haggard face.

Nikolai Antonich stood slightly apart with lowered head, and Nina Kapitonovna held his arm. It looked as if she was supporting him,

though he stood quite straight. The Bubenchikov old ladies were there, too, looking like nuns in their old-fashioned black dresses.

Katya was standing next to them staring steadily at the gate. Her cheeks were rosy in spite of her grief, which was evident even in the impatient gesture with which she adjusted her hat when it kept slipping down on her forehead-probably she had not pinned her hair up properly.

Half an hour passed, but the coffin had not been carried out yet. And then suddenly I decided to go up to her.

It may not have been the right thing for me to do at such a moment as this—I don't know. But I wanted to say something to her, if only a single word.

"Katya!"

She had looked at me and turned away.

I sat over my books for days on end. This was my last semester at school, and I was determined to get "highly satisfactory" marks on all subjects. This was no simple task, especially when it came to Literature.

Came the day when even Likho, with an air of pained reluctance, gave me his "highly satisfactory". My passing-out essay did not worry me-I just dashed it off in accordance with the requirements of this loaf-head, knowing that he would give me a high mark if only through gratified pride.

I came out top of the class, with only Valya ahead of me. But then he had brilliant capabilities and was much cleverer than me.

But the shadow crept on. It was with an effort that Korablev brought himself to look at me whenever we met. Nikolai Antonich did not come to the school, and though no one mentioned our clash at the Teachers' Council, they all regarded me with a sort of reproach, as if that fainting fit of his at the council meeting and Maria Vasilievna's death vindicated him completely.

Everyone avoided me and I was lonelier than ever. But I little knew what blow awaited me.

One day, about a fortnight after Maria Vasilievna's death, I went in to see Korablev. I wanted to ask him to go with us to the Geology Museum (I was then a Young Pioneer leader and my group had asked to be taken to the museum).

But he came out to me in a very agitated state and told me to call later.

"When, Ivan Pavlovich?"

"I don't know. Later."

In the hall hung a coat and hat and on a side table lay the brown woollen scarf which I had seen the old lady was knitting. Korablev had Nikolai Antonich in his room. I went away.

What was Nikolai Antonich doing there? He hadn't been in Korablev's place for at least four years. What was Korablev so upset about?

When I went back, Nikolai Antonich was no longer there. I remember everything as if it were yesterday: the stove was burning, and Korablev, wearing the thick shaggy jacket he always put on when he was a little tipsy or out of sorts, was sitting in front of the stove, gazing into the fire. He looked up when I came in, and said: "What have you done, Sanya! My God, what have you done!"

"Ivan Pavlovich!"

"My God, what have you done!" he repeated in a tone of despair. "It isn't him, it isn't him at all! He has proved it undeniably, incontestably."

"I don't understand, Ivan Pavlovich. What are you talking about?"

Korablev got up, then sat down and got up again.

"Nikolai Antonich has been to see me. He has proved me that the Captain's letter does not refer to him at all. It's some other Nikolai, some merchant by the name of von Vyshimirsky."

I was astounded.

"But Ivan Pavlovich, it's a lie. He's lying!"

"No, it's true," said Korablev. "It was a vast undertaking of which we know nothing. There were lots of people involved, merchants, ship chandlers and what not, and the Captain knew all about it from the very beginning. He knew that the expedition had been fitted out very badly, and he wrote to Nikolai Antonich about it. I saw his letters with my own eyes."

I could hardly believe my ears. I had always thought that the letter I had found at Ensk was the only one in existence, and this news about other letters from the Captain simply bowled me over.

"Lots of things went wrong with them," Korablev continued. "Some ship owner took the crew off just when they were putting out to sea, they managed, with great difficulty, to get a wireless telegraph installation, but had to leave it behind because they couldn't get an operator, and other troubles-so why should Nikolai Antonich be blamed for all this? It's as clear as anything, my God. And I-I guessed as much... But I-"

He broke off and suddenly I saw that he was crying. "Ivan Pavlovich," I said looking away. "It turns out then, that it's not his fault, but the fault of that 'von' somebody or other. In that case why did Nikolai Antonich always claim that he had been in charge of the whole business? Ask him how many beef tea cubes the expedition took with them, how much macaroni, biscuits and coffee. Why did he never mention this 'von' before?"

Korablev wiped his eyes and moustache with his handkerchief. He got some vodka from the cupboard, poured out half a tumbler and immediately poured a little back with a shaking hand. He drank the vodka and sat down again.

"Oh, what does it matter now?" he said with a wave of his hand. "But how blind I was, how terribly blind!" he exclaimed again in a tone of despair. "I should have persuaded her that it was impossible, incredible, that even if it was Nikolai Antonich-all the same you couldn't throw the blame for the failure of such a vast venture on a single man. I could have said that your insistence was due to your hatred of the man."

I listened to Korablev in silence. I had always liked him and had a great respect for him, and it was all the more unpleasant to me to see him in this abject state. He kept blowing his nose, and his hair and moustache were dishevelled.

"Whether I hate him or not," I said -quietly, "has nothing to do with it. I don't know what you meant by it, anyway. Do you mean that I stuck to my version for base personal motives?" Korablev was silent. "Ivan Pavlovich!" He was still silent.

"Ivan Pavlovich!" I shouted. "You think I got mixed up in this on purpose so's to have my revenge on Nikolai Antonich? Is that why you said that even if it was him and not some 'von' or other—all the same you couldn't throw the blame for the failure of such a vast enterprise on

a single man? You believe it's all my fault? Why don't you answer? Do you?"

Korablev was silent. Everything went dark before my eyes and my heart pounded in my ears.

"Ivan Pavlovich," I said in a quivering but determined voice. "It remains for me now to prove that I am right, even if I have to die in the attempt. But I will prove it. I'll go and see Nikolai Antonich this very day and ask him to show me those documents and letters. He has convinced you, now let him convince me."

"Do whatever you like," Korablev said drearily.

I went away. He hadn't stirred and remained seated by the stove, weary and sunk in despair. We were both in despair, only with me this feeling was mixed with a sort of cool fury, whereas he was utterly desolated, old and alone in a cold, empty flat.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

SLANDER

It was all very well to say I'd go and see him and ask him to show me those letters. I felt sick at the mere thought. I doubted whether he would even speak to me. As likely as not he'd throw me down the stairs without further ado. I couldn't very well fight him. After all, he was a sick old man.

I would have abandoned the idea but for a single thought that never left me - Katya.

I felt my head beginning to ache at the mere thought of how she had turned away from me at the funeral. Now I knew why she had done that: Nikolai Antonich had convinced her that it was all my fault.

I could imagine him talking to her and my heart sank. "That friend of yours has such an excellent memory. Why did he never mention those letters before his trip to Ensk?"

Why indeed? How could I have forgotten them? I, who had been so fascinated by them as a child? I, who had recited them by heart on the trains between Ensk and Moscow? To forget letters which had dropped upon our little town like a message from some distant stars?

I had only one explanation-judge for yourselves whether it is correct or not.

When Katya told me the story of her father, when I examined those old photographs of him in his regulation jacket with epaulettes and service cap, when I read his books, it had always seemed to me that all this belonged to a very distant past, at any rate years before I left Ensk. The letters, on the other hand, belonged to my childhood, that is, to quite a different time. It never occurred to me that these two entirely different periods followed close upon each other. This was not an error of memory, but quite a different kind of error.

I thought about that "von" a thousand times if I thought about him once. It was about him, then, that Captain Tatarinov had written: "The whole expedition sends him our curses." It was about him, then, that he wrote: "We owe all our misfortunes to him alone." And Korablev

had said that you couldn't throw the blame for the failure of such an enterprise on a single man. The Captain had thought otherwise.

So it was about him that he wrote: "That's the price we had to pay for that good office." But why should some "von" or other render Captain Tatarinov this good office? A good office could have been rendered by his rich cousin—no wonder he had always had so much to say about it.

In short, I had no plan of action whatever when, dressed in my Sunday best, I called on the Tatarinovs that evening and told the girl-a stranger to me-who answered the bell that I wanted to see Nikolai Antonich.

Through the open door I could see them drinking tea in the dining-room. Nina Kapitonovna was saying something in a low voice and I saw her sitting by the samovar in her striped shawl.

I don't know what Nikolai Antonich thought when he saw me, but when he appeared in the doorway he started and slightly recoiled. "What do you want?" "I wanted to talk to you." There was a brief pause, then he said: "Come in." I was about to go into his study, but he said: "No, this way." Afterwards I realised this had been a deliberate ruse on his part-to get me into the dining-room so as to deal with me in front of everybody.

They were all somewhat startled to see me following at his heels. The old Bubenchikov ladies, who were the last people I expected to see there, jumped up all together. Katya came into the dining-room through another door and stood stockstill in the doorway. I murmured: "Maybe it's inconvenient here." "No, it's quite convenient."

I should have said "good evening" the moment I came in, but now it was too late to say it. Nevertheless, I bowed. Nina Kapitonovna was the only one who responded-with a slight nod. "Well?"

"You told Ivan Pavlovich that Captain Tatarinov wrote you about a von Vyshimirsky. I want to know this because it makes me look as if I purposely tried to convince Maria Vasilievna of your guilt because I had a grudge against you. At least, that's what Korablev thinks. And others too. In short, I ask you to show me these letters which go to prove that some von Vyshimirsky or other is responsible for the loss of the expedition and that the death of—" (I swallowed the word) "and that all the rest is my fault."

It was rather a long speech, but as I had prepared it beforehand I rattled it off without a hitch. I only stumbled when I mentioned the death of Maria Vasilievna and again at the words "and others too", because I was thinking of Katya. She was still standing in the doorway, tensed, holding her breath.

Only now, during this speech, did I notice how old Nikolai Antonich had grown. With that hooked nose of his and the sagging jowls he was like an old bird, and even his gold tooth, which used to light up his whole face, had lost its brightness.

He breathed heavily as he listened to me. He seemed to be at a loss for a reply. Just then one of the Bubenchikov ladies asked in surprise: "Who is this?"

He drew his breath and began to speak.

"Who is this?" he queried with a hiss. "It's that foul slanderer I've been telling you about day in day out."

"Nikolai Antonich, if you're going to call names—"

"It's the person who killed her," Nikolai Antonich went on. His face quivered and he began to crack his knuckles. "That is the person who slandered me with the most frightful slander the imagination is capable of. But I'm not dead yet!"

Nobody thought he was, and I was about to tell him as much, when he started shouting again:

"I'm not dead yet!"

Nina Kapitonovna took hold of his arm. He wrenched it free.

"I could have had the law on him and have him condemned for everything ... for all that he has done to poison my life. But there are other laws and other bars, and by these laws he will yet be made to feel one day what he has done. He killed her," said Nikolai Antonich, and the tears fairly gushed from his eyes. "She died because of him. Let him go on living if he can..."

Nina Kapitonovna pushed her chair back and took hold of his arm as though she were afraid he was going to fall. He stared at her dully. For a moment I doubted whether I was in the right. But only for a moment.

"Because of whom? My God, because of whom?" Nikolai Antonich went on. "Because of this guttersnipe, who is so devoid of feeling that he dares to come again to the house in which she died. Because of this guttersnipe of impure blood!"

I don't know what he meant by this and why his blood should be any purer than mine. No matter! I listened to him in silence. Katya stood by the wall, rigid and very straight.

"—who has dared to enter the house from which I kicked him out like the snake he is. What a fate mine has been, o God! I gave my whole life to her, I did everything a man could do for the woman he loves, and she dies on account of this vile, contemptible snake, who tells her that I am not I, that I had always deceived her, that I had killed her husband, my own cousin."

I was astonished to hear him speak with such passion and utter abandon. I felt that I had gone very pale. No matter! I knew how to answer him.

"Nikolai Antonich," I said, trying to keep cool and noticing that my tongue was obeying me none too well. "I won't reply to your epithets, because I understand the state you are in. You did turn me out, but I came back and will continue to come back until I have proved that I am absolutely innocent of the death of Maria Vasilievna. And if anyone *is* guilty, it's not me, but someone else. The fact is that you have certain letters of the late Captain Tatarinov which you have used to persuade Korablev and evidently everybody else that I have slandered you. Will you please show me those letters so that all can be persuaded that I am the vile snake you have just said I am."

The uproar that followed these words was terrific. The Bubenchikovs, still understanding nothing, started shouting again: "Who is this?" As nobody explained to them who I was they went on shouting louder still. Nina Kapitonovna was shouting at me too, demanding that I should go away. But Katya did not utter a word. She stood by the wall and looked from Nikolai Antonich to me and back again.

Abruptly, all fell silent. Nikolai Antonich pushed the old lady aside and went into his room from which he returned a moment later with a batch of letters in his hands. Not just one or two letters, but a batch, some forty or so. I don't think they were all Captain Tatarinov's letters,

more probably they were miscellaneous letters from different people in connection with the expedition or something of that sort. He flung the letters at me, spat in my face and dropped into a chair. The old ladies rushed over to him.

Very likely, if he had spat in my face and hit the target, I would have knocked him down or even killed him. Nobody had ever spat in my face, and I would have killed the man who did, rules or no rules. But he missed. And the letters fell short too.

Naturally, I did not pick them up, though there was a moment when I very nearly picked one of them up-one which bore a big wax seal and the words *St. Maria* on it. But I did not pick them up. I was in this house for the last time. Katya stood between us, by the armchair in which he lay with clenched teeth, clutching at his heart. I looked at her, looked her straight in the face, which I was seeing for the last time.

"Ah, well," I said. "I'm not going to read these letters which you have thrown into my face. I'll do another thing. I'll find the expedition—1 don't believe it can have disappeared without a trace—and then we'll see who's right."

I wanted to take my leave of Katya and tell her that I would never forget the way she turned her back on me at the funeral, but Nikolai Antonich suddenly got up from the armchair and a hubbub arose again. The Bubenchikov aunts fell upon me and something struck me painfully on the back. I waved my hand with a hopeless gesture and went away.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

OUR LAST MEETING

I was more lonely than ever, and buried myself in my books , with a sort of cold fury. I seemed to have lost even the faculty of thinking. And a good thing too. It was better that way.

Suddenly it struck me that they might not accept me in the flying school on account of my health, so I took up gymnastics seriously-high jumps, swallow dives, back-bends, bar exercises and whatnot. Every morning I felt my muscles and examined my teeth. What worried me most, though, was my short stature-all my recent troubles seemed to have made me shorter still.

At the end of March, however, I got together all the necessary documents and sent them to the Board of Osoaviakhim *(*A voluntary society for the promotion of aviation and chemical defence.- **Tr.)*** with an application asking to be sent to the School of Aeronautics in Leningrad. There is no need to explain why I wanted to leave Moscow.

Pyotr was going to Leningrad too. He had finally made up his mind to enter the Academy of Arts. Sanya, too, for the same reason.

During the spring holidays Pyotr and I went to Ensk, travelling again without tickets by the way, because we were saving our money for when we left school.

But this was quite a different trip and I myself had become quite a different person these last six months. Aunt Dasha was aghast when she saw me, and the judge declared that people looking as I did should

answer for it before the law and that he would "take every step to discover the reasons for the defendant's lowered morale".

Pyotr was the only person to whom I had given an account - and a brief one at that-of my talk with Korablev and my interview with Nikolai Antonich. Pyotr came out with a surprising suggestion. After listening to my story he said: "I say, what if you do find it?"

"Find what?"

"The expedition."

"What if I do?" I said to myself.

A shiver of excitement ran through me at the thought. And again, as in distant childhood, dissolving views appeared before me: white tents in the snow; panting dogs hauling sledges; a huge man, a giant in fur boots, coming towards the sledges, and I, too, in fur boots and a huge fur cap, standing in the opening of a tent, pipe between my teeth...

There was little hope of such a meeting, however. Deep down in my heart I felt that I was right. But sometimes a chilling sense of doubt would creep into it, especially when I thought of that accursed "von". Shortly before my departure for Ensk, Korablev had told me that Nikolai Antonich had shown him the original power of attorney issued by Captain Tatarinov authorising Nikolai Ivanich von Vyshimirsky to conduct all the business of the expedition. "You were wrong," he had said with succinct cruelty.

I felt lonesome at Ensk, and thought that when I got back to Moscow and took up my books I would have no time to feel lone some. But I did find time. Bitter and silent, I wandered round the school.

Then one day, on coming home, I found a sealed note addressed to "A. Grigoriev, Form 9" lying on the table in the hall where the postman left all our mail.

I opened it and read:

"Sanya, I'd like to have a talk with you. If you're free, come to the public garden in Triumfalnaya Square today at half past seven."

It makes me laugh to think what a change came over everything the moment I read this note. Meeting Likho on the stairs, I said "good afternoon" to him, and at dinner I gave Valya my favourite dish of sweet cream of wheat with raisins.

Then came six o'clock. Then half-past six. Seven. Seven o'clock found me at Triumfalnaya Square. A quarter past. Half past. It was getting dark, but the street lamps had not been lighted yet, and all kinds of ridiculous thoughts came into my mind: "The lamps won't go on and I won't recognise her... The lamps will go on, but she won't come... The lamps won't go on and she won't recognise me..."

The lamps did go on, and that familiar public garden, where Pyotr and I once tried to sell cigarettes, where I had swotted a thousand times at my lessons on spring days, that noisy garden, in which one can swot only when one is seventeen, that old garden which was the meeting place for our whole school, and two others besides— that garden became transformed, like a theatre. In a moment we would meet. Ah, there she was!

We shook hands in silence. It was quite warm, being April 2nd, but all of a sudden it started snowing—as if on purpose to make me remember this day all my life.

"I'm glad you've come, Katya. I've been wanting to speak to you too. I couldn't explain that time, at your place, because Nikolai Antonich didn't give me a chance, the way he started shouting. Of course, if you believe him-"

I was afraid to finish the sentence, because if she did believe him I'd have to leave this garden, where we were sitting pale and grave and talking without looking at each other-leave this garden, which seemed to contain nobody else but us two, though someone was sitting on each garden seat and the dour-faced little keeper was limping up and down the paths.

"Don't let's talk about that any more."

"I can't help talking about it, Katya. If you believe him we have nothing to talk about anyway."

She looked at me, sad and quite grown-up—much older and wiser than I.

"He says it's all my fault," she said.

"Yours?"

"He says that once I believe this unnatural idea that it was he who was meant in Daddy's letter, then I was to blame for everything."

I recollected Korablev once saying to Maria Vasilievna: "Believe me, he's a terrible man." And the Captain had written about him:

"One thing I beg of you: do not trust that man." I leapt to my feet in despair and horror.

"Now he'll be saying it's your fault for fifteen years and you'll believe him, just as Maria Vasilievna did. Don't you realise if you're to blame he gets complete power over you, and you'll do everything he wants."

"I'll go away."

"Where?"

"I don't know yet. I've decided to take up geological survey. I'll graduate and go away."

"You won't go anywhere. You might be able to do it now, but in four years' time... I bet you won't go anywhere. He'll talk your head off, make you believe anything. Didn't Maria Vasilievna believe that he was kind and noble, and, what is more, that she was indebted to him for everything he had done? Why the hell doesn't he leave you alone! Didn't he say that it was all my fault?"

"He says you're just a murderer."

"I see."

"And that he could easily have you tried and shot."

"All right, everybody's to blame except him. And I tell you he's a scoundrel, and it's terrifying even to think that there are people like that in the world."

"Don't let's talk about it any more."

"All right. But tell me this: what do you believe out of all this nonsense?"

For a long time Katya said nothing. I sat down again beside her. My heart in my mouth, I took her hand and she did not move away, did not withdraw it.

"I don't believe you said it on purpose. You really did think it was him."

"I still think so."

"But you shouldn't have tried to persuade me of it, still less Mother."

"But it was him-"

Katya drew back and disengaged her hand.

"Let's not talk about it any more."

"All right, we shan't. Some day I'll prove to you it was him, even if I have to spend my whole life doing it."

"It isn't him. If you don't want me to go away don't let's talk about it any more."

"All right, we shan't."

And we let the matter drop. She asked me about the spring holidays, how I had spent my time at Ensk, how Sanya and the old folks were getting on. And I gave her regards from them. But I didn't say about how lonesome I had been at Ensk without her, especially when I wandered alone round the places where we had been together. I did not know now whether or not she loved me, and it was impossible to ask, though I was dying to all the time. The very word couldn't be uttered, now that we were sitting and talking, so grave and pale, with Katya looking so like her mother. I recalled our journey back to Moscow from Ensk, when we had written on the frosted window-pane with our fingers, and suddenly through the window, a dark field covered with snow had come into view. Everything had changed since then. And we could no longer be to each other what we were before. I was dying to know, though, whether she still loved me or not.

"Katya," I said suddenly. "Don't you love me any more?"

She gave me a startled look, then blushing, put her arms round my neck. We kissed with closed eyes-at least, mine were closed and I think hers were too, because afterwards we opened our eyes together. We kissed in the public garden in Triumfalnaya Square, in the garden where three schools could have seen us. But it was a bitter kiss, a kiss of farewell. Though we arranged to meet again, I felt that it had been our parting kiss.

That's why, after Katya had gone, I remained in the garden and wandered for a long time about the paths in anguish, then sat down on our seat, walked away and came back again. I took off my cap; my head felt hot and there was an ache in my heart. I couldn't go away.

When I got home I found a large envelope on my bedside table. It bore the Osoaviakhim stamp and my full name in a large hand. I tore open the envelope with trembling fingers. Osoaviakhim informed me that my papers had been accepted and that I was to present myself before a medical board on May and for enrolment in the flying school.



PART FOUR

THE NORTH

CHAPTER ONE

FLYING SCHOOL

The summer of 1928. I see myself walking the streets of Leningrad with a small bundle in my hands. The bundle contains my "leaving kit". All inmates of the children's home on leaving school received such a kit. It consisted of a spoon, a mug, two sets of underwear and "everything needed for the first night's lodging". Pyotr and I are living in the home of Semyon Ginsburg, a fitter at the Elektrosila Works and a former pupil of our school. Semyon's mother is afraid of the house-manager, so every morning I take my things away and bring them back again in the evening, making out as though I had just arrived. In the eating rooms we take the first course, costing fifteen kopecks, on even days, and the second course, costing twenty-five kopecks, on odd days. We wander about the vast, spacious city, along the embankments of the broad Neva, and Pyotr, who feels quite at home in Leningrad, tells me about the Bronze Horseman while I think, "Will they accept me or not?"

Three examining boards-medical, credentials and general education. Heart, lungs, ears, heart again. Who am I, where was I born, what school did I go to, and why do I want to become an airman?

Was it true that I was nineteen? Hadn't I added to my age-I didn't look it? Why was my recommendation from the Y.C.L. local signed "Grigoriev"-was he a brother of mine or just a namesake?

And now, at last, the day of all days. I stand outside the Aviation Museum. This is where we had our entrance examinations. It is a huge lion-guarded building in Roshal Prospekt. The lions look at me as if they, too, are about to ask me who I am, where I was born, and whether I am really nineteen.

But the really terrifying part of it comes when I mount the stairs and stand before the black showcase displaying the list of persons enrolled in the flying school.

I read the names in their alphabetical order: "Fadeyev, Fedorov, Frolov, Golomb, Gribkov, Hertz..." A mist swims before my eyes. I read again: "Fedorov, Frolov, Golomb, Gribkov, Hertz..." I'm not there! I take a deep breath and start again: Fedorov, Frolov, Golomb, Gribkov, Hertz. I stare at the list, which seems to contain all the names under the sun except my own, and I feel like a man would feel who has nothing more to live for.

I go home under a pouring rain. Fedorov, Frolov, Golomb ... Lucky Golomb.

Pyotr opens the door and starts at seeing me, drenched and white. "What's the matter?" "Pyotr, my name's not on the list." "Goon!"

Semyon's mother comes flying into the kitchen to ask whether the house-manager saw me coming in. I do not answer her. I sit on a chair and Pyotr stands facing me with a glum look.

The next morning we go together to the Aviation Museum and I find my name on the list. It was in another column along with several other boys whose names began with G. including a couple of Grigorievs-Ivan and Alexander. Pyotr said I hadn't been able to find it because I was too excited.

Time races on, and I see myself in the reading-room of the Aviation Museum, where we had faced the examiners. Thirteen men passed by the credentials and medical boards are lined up, and the School Superintendent, a big, jovial, red-haired man, comes out and says: "Comrade air cadets, attention!"

Comrade air cadets! I am an air cadet! A cold shiver runs up my spine. I feel as if I had been dipped alternately in cold and hot water. I'm an air cadet! I'm going to fly! I do not hear what she Super is saying. Time races on. We go to lectures straight from work at the factory where Semyon Ginsburg has fixed me up as fitter's mate.

We listen to lectures on materiel, the theory of aviation and the engine. After eight hours at work we feel very sleepy, but we listen to the lectures on materiel, the theory of aviation and engines, and once in a while Misha Golomb, who turned out to be as short as myself, leans up against my back and starts to snore gently. When his snores become too audible I carefully bump his head on the desk.

We study at flying school, but what little resemblance that school has to those that go by that name today! We have neither engines, nor aeroplanes, neither premises nor money. True, the Aviation Museum does display a few old sky wagons, in which one could imagine oneself doing air reconnaissance in a De Havilland or seeing a fighting plane in a Newport which last did service at the Civil War fronts. But you couldn't learn to fly on these distinguished "coffins".

We assemble engines. Armed with credentials of Osoaviakhim, that infallible warrant empowering us to take off the walls any aeroplane parts we might need, we make a round of all the recreation rooms and clubs of Leningrad. Sometimes we find these aeroplane parts in the office of the house management, hanging over the desk of the accounts clerk, who happens to be an aviation fan. We commandeer them and carry them off to the airfield. Sometimes this goes off peacefully, sometimes there is a row. Three times we visit the Clothing Workers'

Club, accompanied by a technician, trying to prove to the club manager that the old engine standing in the foyer is of no propaganda value.

Our day starts with our trying, each in turn, to explain to Ivan Gribkov what "horizon" is. We have a fellow named Ivan Gribkov who has all the school trying to explain this to him. Afterwards came the instructors and flight training begins.

My instructor—he is our School Superintendent and has charge of materiel and supplies as well—is an old pilot of Civil War days, a big jovial man, who loves to tell extraordinary stories and can tell them for hours. He is quick-tempered, but quick to cool off, brave and superstitious. His idea of his duties as instructor is of the simplest order: he just swears at you, his language becoming stronger with the altitude. At last he stops swearing—for the first time in six months! It's wonderful! For ten minutes or so I fly in the rarest of good moods. I must be doing the stickwork jolly well, seeing that he doesn't swear at me! Despite the roar of the engine I seem to be flying in complete silence—quite a new experience for me!

But the next moment I see what it is. The intercom had got disconnected and the phone was dangling over the side. I catch it and together with it the close of what must have been a long speech:

"You clot. You shouldn't be flying, you ought to be serving in the sanitary brigade."

Another scene rises before me when I recall my first year in Leningrad. C. comes to the Corps Airfield every day. He has a modest job-flying passengers in an old war-scarred machine. But we know what kind of man he is, we know and love him long before he became known to and loved by the whole country. We know whom the airmen talk about when they gather at the Aviation Museum, which was a sort of club of ours in those days. We know whom our Chief is imitating when he says in a calm bass voice: "Well, how goes it? Can you manage the sharp bank? But no fibbing, mind?"

We run to this man as fast as our legs can carry us when he returns to the airfield after his amazing aerobatics, and the lovers of stunt flying, green as the grass, crawl away almost on all fours, while he looks at us from the cockpit, his goggles off, a flyer of amazing flair, a wizard of sky flying.

Together with the stethoscope which Doctor Ivan Ivanovich left me as a keepsake I carry a photo of this airman about with me wherever I go. He gave this photo to me not in Leningrad where I was an air cadet, but much later, several years afterwards, in Moscow. He wrote on it: "If it's worth doing at all, do it well." Those were his words. So this year passed, a hard but splendid year in Leningrad.

CHAPTER TWO

SANYA 'S WEDDING

I saw Sanya every Sunday and I must say—strange though it may sound coming from a brother—that I came to like her more and more.

She had just entered the Academy of Arts and had found a job with a children's publishing house. She knew all about our doings, Pyotr's and mine, and kept the old folks informed about us. She worked a lot at the

Academy too, and although she lacked Pyotr's vivid talent she painted extremely well. She was fond of doing miniatures, an art that is nowadays almost completely neglected by our painters, and the fastidious care with which she executed all the minute details of faces and dress was simply remarkable. As in childhood, she liked to talk, and when provoked or carried away she would talk so fast and end up in such a rush that her listeners would be dazed. In short, she was a wonderful sister, and now she was getting married.

Of course, it is not hard to guess whom she was marrying, though of all the young men who gathered that evening at the studio of the photographer—artist Berenstein where she rented a room, Pyotr looked the least like a bridegroom. He sat unperturbed and silent beside a sharp-nosed boy, who was talking at him earnestly.

Altogether, it was an odd wedding. All the evening the guests argued about a cow—whether it was right for the artist Filippov to be painting a cow for the last two and a half years. He was said to have divided it into little squares and was painting each square separately. No one took any notice of the newlyweds. Sanya was kept very busy. There were not enough plates to go round and the guests had to be fed in two shifts. She sat down only for a moment, flushed and tired, in her new dress trimmed with lace, which somehow reminded me of Ensk and Aunt Dasha.

"Someone sends you regards," she said to me. "Guess who."

I guessed at once, but answered calmly:

"I don't know."

"Katya."

"Really? Thanks."

Sanya looked at me critically. Her face even paled slightly with annoyance. She realised, of course, that I was pretending.

"You like to fancy yourself a Childe Harold! Now don't you dare tell me a lie on my wedding-day. I'll write to her and say you kept asking me for this letter all day and I wouldn't give it to you."

"I'm not asking you for anything."

"In your heart you are," Sanya said with conviction. "Outwardly you're pretending you don't care. I can let you have it if you like, only you mustn't read the last page. You won't, will you?"

She thrust the letter into my hand and ran away. I read the letter, of course, the last page three times, seeing that it was about me. Katya did not send her regards to me at all, she just inquired how I was getting on and when I was graduating. To look at, it was just an ordinary letter, but really a very sad one. It had this passage in it, for instance: "It is now four o'clock and already dark here, and suddenly I fell asleep and when I woke up I couldn't make out what had happened to make me feel so good. It was because I had dreamt of Ensk and of my aunts getting me dressed for the journey."

I reread this passage several times, and recalled that memorable day, the day of our departure from Ensk. I remembered the old ladies, her aunts, shouting their last-minute admonitions as the train moved out, and how later I had moved into Katya's carriage and we had started to go through our baskets to see what the old folks had put in them. The little unshaven man who shared our compartment was trying to guess what we were, and Katya stood beside me in the corridor and I had

looked at her, standing there, and talked to her. How hard it was to believe, now that she was so far away, that all this really happened...

CHAPTER THREE

I WRITE TO DOCTOR IVAN IVANOVICH

I was angry with Katya, because I had wanted to say goodbye to her before leaving Moscow and had written to her, but she had not answered and had not come to meet me, though she knew I was going away for a long time and that perhaps we should never see each other again. I did not write to her any more, of course. No doubt Nikolai Antonich had succeeded in convincing her that I had slandered him "with the most dreadful slander which the human imagination is capable of, and that I was "a guttersnipe of impure blood" who had caused the death of her mother.

Ah, well, the future was still ours! The memory of that scene made me groan inwardly.

What could I do in Leningrad, working at the factory from eight till five and then at the flying school from five till midnight?

In the winter, before flight training began, we studied in the reading-room of the Aviation Museum. One day I asked the Custodian whether he knew anything about Captain Tatarinov and whether there were any books in the library about him or perhaps his own book *Causes of the Failure of the Greely Expedition.*

I don't know why, but the Custodian showed a great interest in the question.

"Captain Tatarinov?" he queried in surprise. "Oho! Why does that interest you?"

To answer that question I should have had to tell him everything you have read in this book. So I answered briefly:

"Oh, I just like reading about voyages of exploration." "Very little, if anything, is known about this voyage," said the Custodian. "Come along, let's go into the library."

Without him, of course, I would never have found anything, as it was all in the form of newspaper articles. There was only one book, or rather a booklet of some twenty-five pages entitled *Woman at Sea*. The Captain, I discovered, had not only written about the Greely Expedition,

The booklet went out to prove that a woman could become a sailor and quoted instances from the life of the fisher folk on the shores of the Sea of Azov, when women in dangerous situations had behaved as well as men and even shown themselves braver. The Captain wrote that he visualised a time when ships would carry "women engineers, women navigators and women captains".

As I read this booklet I recollected the Captain's notes on Nansen's voyage and his report concerning the 1911 expedition to the North Pole, and it struck me for the first time that he was not only a brave sailor, but a broadminded man of extraordinarily keen intellect.

The writers of some of the articles evidently thought otherwise. In the *Peterburgskaya Gazeta,* for instance, one journalist came out against the expedition on the grounds that the Council of Ministers had "turned down Captain Tatarinov's request for the necessary funds". Another

newspaper carried an interesting photograph—a beautiful white ship which reminded me of the caravels in *The Century of Discovery*. It was the schooner *St. Maria*. She looked slim and graceful, too slim and graceful to make the voyage from St. Petersburg to Vladivostok along the shores of Siberia.

The next issue of the same newspaper carried a still more interesting photograph—the crew of the schooner. True, it was very difficult to make anything out on this photograph, but the arrangement of the group with the Captain seated in the middle, arms folded over his chest, struck me as very familiar. Where had I seen that photograph? Of course-at the Tatarinovs, among a lot of other photos, which Katya had once shown me. I continued thinking back. No, it was not at the Tatarinovs! It was at Doctor Ivan Ivanovich's -that's where I had seen it! And suddenly a very simple idea occurred to me. At the same time, however, it was an extraordinary one, which only Doctor Ivan Ivanovich could confirm. There and then I decided to write to him. It was about seven years since he had left Moscow, but I was quite certain that he was alive and well.

CHAPTER FOUR

I RECEIVE A REPLY

A month passed, then a second and a third. We had finished our theoretical studies and moved out to the Corps Airfield.

It was a Big Day at the airfield-September 25th, 1930. We still remember it by that name. It began as usual: 7 a.m. found us sitting by our "crates". At nine o'clock the instructor arrived and things began to happen. For one thing, he had brought with him an imposing-looking man in a Russian blouse and gold-rimmed spectacles. This we soon discovered to be the secretary of the District Party Committee. Secondly... But this "secondly" needs going into greater
detail.

We made several flights that day with the instructor, and he kept studying me all the time, and, contrary to custom, he did not swear at me.

"Well," he said at last. "Now fly solo."

I must have looked excited, because he regarded me for a moment with a searching, kindly look. He checked the instruments to see whether they were working properly, and fastened the straps in the first, now empty, cockpit.

"A routine round flight. Take off, start climbing. Don't turn until you're a hundred and fifty metres off the ground. Bank, then come in to land."

With a feeling as though it were not I but someone else doing it, I taxied to the end of the runway and raised my hand for permission to take off. The flight-controller waved his white flag for me to go. I opened the throttle and sent the machine down the airfield.

I had long forgotten that childish sense of disappointment I had experienced when, on the first taking to the air, I realised what flying meant. In those days I had always imagined that I would fly like a bird, whereas here I was sitting in an armchair just as if I were on the ground. I sat in the armchair and I had no time to think either of the earth or the sky. It was not until my tenth or eleventh solo flight that I noticed that the earth below me was patterned like a map and that we lived in a very precise geometrical world. I liked the shadows of the clouds scattered here and there on the ground, and altogether it dawned on me that the world was very beautiful.

And so this was my first solo flight. The instructor's cockpit is empty. The first turn. The cockpit is empty and the machine becomes airborne. A second turn. I am flying quite alone, with a wonderful sensation of complete freedom. A third turn. Time to land now. Fourth turn. Attention! I cut off the engine. The ground gets closer and closer. There it is, right under the machine. The landing run. The touch-down. It must have been a decent performance, seeing that even our grumpy instructor nodded approval, while Misha Golomb, behind his back, gave me the thumbs-up sign.

"Sanya, you're a topnotcher," he said, when we sat down on a grassy bank to have a smoke. "Honest, you are. By the way, there's a letter for you. I was at the Aviation Museum today and the doorman said: 'One for Grigoriev. Maybe you'll give it to him?'"

And he held out a letter to me. It was from Doctor Ivan Ivanovich.

"Dear Sanya, I am very glad to hear you are well. I am looking forward to welcoming you with your plane, as we have to use dogs here all the time for travelling. Now about the photograph. It was given to me by the navigating officer of the *St. Maria,* Ivan Klimov. He was brought to Archangel in 1914 with frostbitten feet and died in the hospital from blood-poisoning. He left a couple of notebooks and some letters-quite a lot of them, round about twenty, I believe. This, of course, was the mail, which he had brought with him from the ship, though he may have written some of the letters himself during his journey-he was picked up somewhere by Lieutenant Sedov's expedition. When he died the hospital posted these letters to their respective addresses, but the notebooks and photographs remained with me. As you are acquainted with Captain Tatarinov's family and are determined 'to present a correct picture of his life and death', you will naturally be interested to know about these notebooks. They are ordinary school copybooks and the writing in them, done in pencil, is unfortunately quite illegible. I tried several times to read them, but had to give it up. This is about all I know. This happened at the end of 1914 when the war had just started and nobody was interested in Captain Tatarinov's expedition. These notebooks and photographs are still in my possession and you can read them if you have the patience when you come, or rather fly out here. My address is: 24 Kirov Street, Zapolarie, Arctic Circle.

"I expect more letters from my interesting patient. Your doctor, I. Pavlov."

Just as I had thought! That photo had been left by the navigating officer. The doctor has seen the man with his own eyes. The very same man who had written: "I remain your obedient servant, I. Klimov,

Navigating Officer." The very same man who had fascinated me for life with the glamorous words "latitude", "schooner", "expedition", "the *From"* and the extraordinary politeness of his "I hasten to inform you" and "I hope to see you soon".

I decided that as soon as I left school I would go to Zapolarie and read his notebooks. The doctor had given it up, but he wouldn't have done so if he had had the hope of finding in them as much as a single word to prove that he had been right, if somebody had spat in his face, if Katya had thought that he had killed her mother...

CHAPTER FIVE

THREE YEARS

Youth does not end in a single day; you do not mark that day off in the calendar: "Today my youth has ended." It passes imperceptibly, and it is gone before you know it.

From Leningrad they sent me to Balashov. After graduating from the flying school I started studying at another-this time under a real instructor and on a real machine.

I do not recall any period in my life when I worked so diligently.

"Do you know how you fly?" our School Superintendent had said to me back in Leningrad. "Like an old tub. For the North you have to be first rate."

I learnt night-flying, when you get into the dark the moment you take off, and while you are climbing you feel all the time as if you are making your way gropingly through a dark corridor. I learnt to fly blind, when everything around you is wrapped in a white mist and you seem to be flying through millions of years into a different geological epoch; as if you are being borne on and on in a Time-Machine instead of an aeroplane.

I learnt that an airman has to know the properties of the air, all its ways and whims, just as a good sailor knows the ways of the sea.

Those were the years when the Arctic, until then regarded as a remote and useless icy wilderness, had drawn closer to us and when the first great air jumps were attracting the whole country's attention. Every day articles about Polar expeditions by sea and air appeared in the newspapers and I read them with a thrill. I was longing for the North with all my heart.

Then, one day, when I was about to take one of the most difficult examination flights and was already seated in the cockpit, I saw a newspaper in the hands of my instructor. It had something in it which made me take off my helmet and goggles and climb out of the plane.

"Warm greetings and congratulations to the members of the expedition which has successfully solved the problem of navigating the Arctic Ocean" was printed in big letters right across the front page.

Paying no heed to what the astonished instructor was saying to me, I looked at the page again, trying to take it all in at a glance. "Great Northern Sea Route Opened", one article was headed. "The *Sibiryakov* in the Bering Strait" ran another. "Salute to the Victors" said a third.

This was the news of the historic expedition of the *Sibiryakov,* which for the first time in history had navigated the Northern Sea Route in a single season-the route which Captain Tatarinov had attempted in the schooner *St. Maria.*

"What's the matter with you? Are you ill?"

"No, I'm all right."

"Altitude one thousand two hundred metres. Two sharp banks one way, then two the other. Four upward spins."

"Okay!"

I was so excited that I was almost on the point of asking permission to put off the flight.

All that day I thought of Katya, of poor Maria Vasilievna, and of the Captain, whose life had become so surprisingly interwoven with my own. But this time I was thinking of them in a different way and my grievances appeared to me now in a different, calmer light. Of course, I had not forgotten anything. I had not forgotten my last talk with Maria Vasilievna, in which every word of hers had had a secret meaning—her farewell to her youth and to life. itself. I had not forgotten how I had sat the next day in the waiting-room together with the old lady, and the door had opened revealing something white with a dark head and a bare arm dangling from a couch. I had not yet forgotten how Katya had turned away form me at the funeral, nor had I forgotten my dreams of meeting her in a few years' time and tossing to her the proofs showing that I had been right. I had not forgotten how Nikolai Antonich had spat in my face.

But all this suddenly presented itself to me like a play in which the chief character is offstage and appears only in the last act, and until then he is merely talked about. They all talked about a man whose portrait hangs on the wall-the portrait of a naval officer with a broad forehead, a square jaw and deep-set eyes. Yes, he was the chief character in this play. He was a great explorer, killed by non-recognition and his history had a significance far beyond the bounds of personal affairs and family relationships. The Great Northern Sea Route had been opened—that was his history. Through navigation of the Arctic Ocean in a single season-that had been his idea. The men who had solved the problem which had confronted mankind for four hundred years were his men. He could talk with them as equals.

What, compared with this, were my own dreams, hopes and desires! What did I want? Why did I become an airman? Why was I so keen on going to the North?

And now, as in my imaginary play, everything clicked into place and quite simple ideas came into my head concerning my future and my job.

I was keen on the North and on my profession as a polar airman because it was a profession which demanded from me endurance, courage and love for my country and my job.

Who knows but that I, too, one day may be named among those men who could have talked as equals with Captain Tatarinov?

A month before I finished the Balashov school I put in an application to be sent to the North. But the school would not let me go.

I was kept on as instructor and spent another whole year at Balashov. I would hardly call myself a good instructor. Of course, I could teach a man to fly without experiencing any desire to swear at him every minute. I understood my pupils. It was quite clear to me, for instance,

why, on coming out of the plane, one man hastened to light up, while another wore an air of studied jollity. I was not a teacher by vocation and found it boring to have to explain a thousand times to others things I had learnt long ago.

In August 1933 I got leave and went to Moscow. My travelling warrant was made out for Ensk via Leningrad and people were expecting me in both these places. Nevertheless I decided to stop over in Moscow, where no one was expecting me.

Of course, I had no intention of phoning Katya, all the more as I had received only one greeting from her in all these three years-through Sanya—and everything was finished and long forgotten. So completely finished and forgotten that I even decided I would ring her up and had prepared for the occasion an opening phrase in a polite impersonal tone. But somehow, when I lifted the receiver in my room at the hotel, my hand began to shake and I found myself asking for another number instead-that of Korablev.

He was out of town, on his holiday, and the woman who answered the phone said that he would not be back until the beginning of the school year.

Valya, too, was out of town. I was politely informed that lecturer Zhukov was in the Far North and would be away for six months.

There was no one else I could phone in Moscow, unless it was some secretary or other member of the staff of the Civil Aviation Board. But I had no use for secretaries. I picked up the receiver and gave the number.

Nina Kapitonovna answered the phone—I recognised her kind firm voice at once.

"May I speak to Katya?"

"Katya?" she queried in surprise. "She's not here."

"Not at home?"

"Not at home and not in town. Who's that speaking?"

"Grigoriev," I said. "Could you give me her address?"

Nina Kapitonovna was silent awhile. Obviously, she hadn't recognised me. The world was full of Grigorievs.

"She's doing field work. Her address is: Geological Party of Moscow University, Troitsk."

I thanked her and rang off.

I did not stay long in Moscow. They received me very politely at the offices of the Northern Sea Route Administration and the Civil Aviation Board. My being sent to the North was out of the question, I was told, until the Balashov School released me.

I did not succeed in getting an assignment to the North until eighteen months later, and that quite by chance. In Leningrad I had made the acquaintance of an old Arctic pilot who wanted to return to Central Russia. He was getting too old to fly under the arduous conditions of the North. We made an exchange, he taking my place at the school and I getting an assignment as second pilot on one of the Far North air roots.

CHAPTER SIX

I MEET THE DOCTOR

The house was not difficult to find, as the street consisted of a single house, all the rest existing only in the imagination of the builders of Zapolarie.

It was getting dark when I knocked on the doctor's door. The windows lit up and a shadow moved slowly across the blind. No one opened the door, and after waiting for a while, I quietly opened it myself and stepped into a clean spacious passage.

"Anybody at home?"

No one answered. A besom stood in the corner and I cleaned the snow off my high felt boots with it—the snow outside was knee-deep.

"Is there anybody here?"

A ginger kitten sprang out from under the hallstand, stared at me in fright and fled. Then the doctor appeared in the doorway.

Medically I suppose it would sound improbable, but the fact of the matter was that in all those years the doctor had not only not aged, but even managed to look younger. He more than ever now resembled that lanky, jolly, bearded doctor who had dropped down on me and my sister in the village that memorable winter.

"Do you want to see me?"

"Yes, Doctor, I'd like you to see a patient," I said quickly. "An interesting case of muteness without deafness. The man can hear everything but can't say 'mummy'."

The doctor slowly pushed his glasses up on his forehead.

"I beg your pardon..."

"I said an interesting case," I went on gravely. "The man can pronounce *only* six words: hen, saddle, box, snow, drink, Abraham. Patient G., case record described in a journal."

The doctor came up to me as if he were going to examine my tongue and ears, but he simply said: "Sanya!"

We embraced.

"So you've flown in after all!"

"Yes, I flew."

He put his arms round my shoulder and led me into the dining-room. A boy of about twelve was standing there who looked very much like the doctor. He gave me his hand and introduced himself: "Volodya."

"Yes, Doctor, I'd like you to see a patient," I said quickly. "An interesting case of muteness without deafness. The man can hear everything but can't say 'mummy'."

The doctor slowly pushed his glasses up on his forehead.

"I beg your pardon..."

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"Volodya."

It was lighter here than in the passage, and the doctor looked me over again. I suspect he was strongly tempted to have a peek in my ear.

While we were sitting drinking tea the doctor's wife, Anna Stepanovna, came in. She was a tall, portly woman, who, in her anorak and reindeer-skin high boots, looked like some Northern god. She was just as big even when she took off her anorak and boots, and the tall doctor did not look so tall beside her. She had quite a young face and altogether she went very well with this clean wooden house with its yellow floor boards and country-style floor runners. There was something of old Russia about her, as there was of the town itself, though it was an entirely new town built only five or six years before. Afterwards I learned that she was a Pomor. *(Pomor—a* native of the White Sea maritime area – Tr.)

"Ivan Ivanovich," I said, when we had eaten everything on the table and started on the delicious home-made cloudberry wine, "do you remember those letters we wrote to each other when I was in Leningrad?"

"I do."

"You wrote me a very interesting letter about that navigating officer," I went on, "and I'd like to know whether you've kept those notebooks of his."

"Yes, I have them."

"Good. Now let me tell you something. It's a fairly long story, but I'm going to tell it nevertheless. As you know, it was you who once taught me to speak. So now you have only yourself to blame."

And I told him everything, beginning with the letters which Aunt Dasha used to read out to me. About Katya I said only a few words by way of information. But at this point in my story the doctor, for some reason, smiled, then quickly assumed a look of gravity.

"He was a very tired man, that navigator," he said. "He really died from fatigue, not gangrene. He had spent too much strength fighting death and hadn't enough left to live with. That was the impression he gave."

"You talked to him?"

"Yes."

"What about?"

"I think it was about some town down South," the doctor said. "Sukhumi, or maybe Baku. It was an obsession with him. Everyone was talking about the war in those days-it had just started, but he only talked about Sukhumi, how good it was down there, how warm. I suppose he came from there."

"Ivan Ivanovich, have you got his diaries here? In this house?"

"Yes."

"Let me see them."

These diaries had been on my mind for so long that I had begun to see them as thick books bound in black cloth. But the doctor went out and reappeared a few minutes later with two thin copybooks such as

children use in school. I could hardly suppress my excitement as I opened one of them at random. "To Navigator Iv. Dm. Klimov.

"I order you and all those listed below, in accordance with your wishes and theirs, to leave the ship with the aim of reaching inhabited land..."

"Why, Doctor, he had an excellent hand! I can read it quite easily." "It's my excellent hand you're reading," the doctor said. "I have written out the parts I have been able to decipher on separate sheets. The rest is like this-look."

Saying which, he opened the copybook at the first page. I had seen some poor handwriting in my day, Valya Zhukov's, for instance; he used to write in such a way that the teachers for a long time thought he was doing it to annoy them. But handwriting such as this I had never seen in my life. It was like so many fishhooks the size of pinheads scattered higgledy-piggledy all over the page. The first few pages were smeared with some kind of grease and the pencil marks were barely visible on the yellow parchment-like paper. Further on came a hodgepodge of unfinished words, then a rough-drawn map, followed by another jumble of words, which no graphologist could have made head or tail of.

"All right," I said, closing the notebook. "I'll read this." The doctor looked at me with admiration. "I wish you success," he said earnestly.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I READ THE DIARIES

I would not call myself an impatient person. But I think that only a genius of patience could have waded through those diaries. Obviously, they had been written during halts, by the light of smoky wicks burning seal oil, in forty-five degrees of frost, with a frozen and tired hand. In some places the hand could be seen to have slipped, tracing a long, drooping, meaningless line.

But I had to read them!

Again and again I tackled this arduous job. Every night-and on flight-free days from early morning-I sat down at the table with a magnifying glass, engaged in the slow, painful task of transforming the fish-hooks into human words-now words of despair, now of hope. At first I went straight through, just sat down and read. And then I hit on a bright idea. I started to read whole pages at a time instead of trying to decipher the separate words.

In going through the diaries I noticed that some of the pages were written much more legibly than others-the order, for example, which the doctor had copied out. I copied from these passages all the letters from *a* to z and compiled a "Navigator's ABC" in which I reproduced exactly all the variants of his handwriting. With the aid of this alphabet the work proceeded much more rapidly. Very often a correct guess of one or two letters -made with the help of this alphabet would make all the rest clear.

And so, day after day, I deciphered these diaries.

Wednesday, May 27. Started out late and did 4 versts in 6 hours. Today is a red-letter day for us. We reckon that we have covered a distance of 100 versts from the ship. Of course, this is not much for a month's trek, but the going has been much harder than we had expected. We celebrated the occasion by cooking a soup from dried bilberries seasoned with two tins of condensed milk.

Friday, May 29. If we do reach the shore, may those men—1 do not want even to name them—remember May 29th, the day of their deliverance from death, and mark it every year. But though the men were saved, they lost a double-barrelled gun and the stove on which we did our cooking. As a result we had to eat raw meat yesterday and drink cold water diluted with milk. May God help me to reach the shore safely with this bunch of gaw-gaws!

Sunday, May 31. Here is the official document authorising me to leave with part of the crew:

"To Navigating Officer Ivan Klimov.

"I hereby order you and all those listed below, in accordance with your wishes and theirs, to leave the ship with the aim of reaching inhabited land, and to do this on the 10th inst., setting out across the ice on foot and taking with you sledges and kayaks as well as provisions for two months. On leaving this ship you are to head south until you sight land; on sighting which you are to act according to circumstances, but preferably try to make the British Channel between the islands of Franz-Josef Land, following it, as being best known, down to Cape Flora where you are likely to find food and' shelter. After that, time and circumstances permitting, you are to head for Spitsbergen. On reaching Spitsbergen you will be confronted with the difficult task of finding people there, as we do not know where they are to be located, but hope that you will be able to find people in the southern part of the island or at least some fishing vessel off the coast. You are to be accompanied by thirteen men of the crew, who have expressed their wish to go with you. Captain of the schooner *St. Maria*

Ivan Tatarinov" "April 10,1914 Arctic Ocean."

God knows how hard it was for me to go, leaving him in such a difficult, almost hopeless plight.

Tuesday, June 2. On board ship Engineer Komev had improvised four pairs of spectacles for us against the snow glare, the glasses of which were made from gin bottles. The leading sledges are drawn by the lucky ones who can see, while the "blinded" ones trail in their wake with closed eyes, which they open from time to time to peer at the track. The pitiless glare hurts the eyes. Here is a picture of our progress, which I shall never forget: we are trudging along with measured step, shoulders hunched forward, the harness straps tight round our chests, while we hold on to the side of the kayak with one hand. We walk with eyes tightly closed. Each carries a ski-pole in his right hand which, with mechanical precision, he throws forward, draws back to the right and slowly trails behind him. How monotonously and distinctly the snow crunches under the disk of the ski-pole. In spite of oneself one listens to this crunching, which seems to be repeating clearly: "Long, long way." We walk as though in a trance, mechanically pushing our feet forward and throwing our weight against the straps. Today I fancied that I was

walking along a quayside on a hot summer's day, in the shade of some tall houses. These houses were eastern fruit stores, their doors were wide open and the aromatic, spicy odour of fresh and dried fruits came from them. There was a heady scent of oranges, peaches, dried apples and cloves. Persian tradesmen watered the asphalt pavement which was soft from the heat, and I could hear their calm, guttural speech. God, how good it smelt, how pleasantly cool it was. Stumbling over my pole brought me back to earth. I clutched the kayak and stared around me—snow, snow, snow, as far as the eyes could see. The sun is as blinding and painful to the eyes as ever.

Thursday, June 4. Today, following in Dunayev's tracks, I noticed that he was spitting blood. I examined his gums. The last few days he has been complaining about his legs.

Friday, June 5. I can't get Captain Tatarinov out of my mind. During the little speech he made when seeing us off he suddenly stopped, clenched his teeth and looked round with a sort of helpless smile. He was ill; I had left him when he was just out of his sickbed. God, what a frightful mistake it was! But I can't very well turn back.

Saturday, June 6. Morev has kept at me these three last days, saying that he has spotted, from the top of an ice-hummock, a perfectly level stretch of ice running far out to the south. "I saw it with my own eyes. Sir. As flat as flat can be." This morning he was missing from the tent. He had gone off without his skis and the tracks of his snow-shoes were faintly visible in the thin layer of dry snow. We searched for him all day, shouting, whistling and firing shots. He would have answered us, as he had a magazine rifle with a dozen cartridges. But we heard nothing.

Sunday, June 7. We made a mast about ten metres high out of kayaks, skis and ski-poles, attached two flags to it and hoisted it on a hilltop. If he is alive he will see our signals.

Tuesday, June 9. On our way again. Thirteen men left-an unlucky number. When shall we make land, be it even barren and inhospitable land, but land that stands still and on which you have no fear of being carried away to the north?

Wednesday, June 10. This evening I had another vision of a southern town, the sea front, a cafe by night with people in panama hats. Sukhumi? Again that spicy, aromatic odour of fruit, and the bitter thought: "Why did I go on this voyage to a cold, icebound sea, when it was so good sailoring in the south? There it was warm. One could go about in a shirt, and even barefooted. One could eat lots of oranges, grapes and apples." Strange, why was I never particularly fond of fruit? But chocolate, too, is good stuff, eaten with ship's biscuits, the way we eat it at our midday halt. Only we get very little of it-just one square each from the bar. How good it would be to have a plateful of these biscuits in front of you and a whole bar of chocolate all to yourself. How many more miles, how many hours, days and weeks before this will become possible!

Thursday, June 11. The going is hell. Deep snow with a lot of water under it. Open water blocks our path all the time. Did no more than three versts today. All day a mist and that dull light that makes the eyes hurt so much. I see this notebook now as though through a film and hot tears run down my cheeks. It will be Whitsun soon. How good it will be "there" this day, somewhere down south, and how bad here, on the floating ice, all cut up by open stretches of water, in latitude 82°! The ice

shifts right before our eyes. One glade disappears to give way to another, like giants playing a game of chess on a gigantic chessboard.

Sunday, June 14. I have made a discovery of which I have said nothing to my companions: we are drifting past the land. Today we reached the latitude of Franz-Josef Land and are continuing to push south, but there is no sign of any island. We are being carried past the land. lean tell this both from my utterly useless chronometer, from the prevailing winds and from the direction of the line lowered in the water.

Monday, June 15. I abandoned him, a sick man, in a state of despair, which only he was capable of concealing. This robs me of all hope for our deliverance.

Tuesday, June 16. I now have two men with scurvy. Sotkin has fallen ill too, his gums are bleeding and swollen. I treat them by sending them forward on skis to find a way for us and giving them each at night a quinine water. This may be a harsh method of treatment, but I think the only possible one for a man whose morale has not broken down. The worst form of scurvy I had seen was that from which Captain Tatarinov had suffered. He had had it for close on six months and only by a superhuman effort of will did he force himself to recover, that is, he simply forbade himself to die. And this will, this broad, free mind and indomitable moral courage are doomed to perish.

Thursday, June 18. Latitude 81°. The rapidity of our southward drift is amazing.

Friday, June 19. At about four o'clock, E.S.-E. of our halting place I spotted "something". It was two pinkish cloudlets on the horizon, which did not change shape until hidden in the mist. I don't think we were ever surrounded by so many open lanes of water as now. Lots of pochards and screaming white gulls are flying about. Oh, these gulls! How often, at night, they keep me awake with their fuss and bustle and bickering over the entrails of a shot seal thrown out onto the ice. Like evil spirits they mock at us, laughing hysterically, screeching, whistling and all but cursing. How long, I wonder, will I be haunted by these "cries of the snow-white gull", by these sleepless nights in a tent, by this sun which never sets and shines through its canvas!

Saturday, June 20. During the week we have been halted we have drifted a whole degree southward with the ice.

Monday, June 22. In the evening, as usual, I climbed to the top of some pack-ice to scan the horizon. This time, E. of where I stood, I saw something which made me so excited that I had to sit down on the ice and start hastily rubbing both my eyes and my binoculars. It was a bright strip like a neat stroke made by a brush on a light-blue ground. At first I took it for the moon, but the left segment of that moon grew gradually dimmer while the right one became more sharply etched. During the night I went out four or five times to look through my binoculars and each time I found this piece of moon in the same place. I am surprised none of my companions saw it. How hard it was for me to restrain myself from running into the tent and shouting at the top of my voice: "What are you sitting here like dummies, why are you sleeping, don't you see we are being carried towards land?" But for some reason I kept it to myself. Who knows, maybe it was a mirage too. Hadn't I seen myself on the sea-front of a southern town on a hot summer's day, in the shade of tall buildings!

The first notebook ended on this sentence. The second started on July 11.

Saturday, July 11. We killed a seal from which we drew two bowls of blood. With this and some pochards we made a very good soup. When we are making tea or soup we are usually very serious about it. This morning we ate a pailful of soup and drank a pailful of tea; for dinner we ate a pailful of soup, drank a pail of tea; and now for supper we have eaten over a pound of meat each and are waiting impatiently for our pail of tea to boil. Our pail is a big one, shaped like a truncated cone. I daresay we wouldn't mind cooking and eating another pail of soup right now, only we feel we must restrict ourselves, "economise". Our appetites are more than wolfish; it is something abnormal.

And so we are now sitting on an island, and beneath us is not ice, on which we have been these last two years, but earth and moss. All is well but for one thought, which gives me no peace: why did the Captain not come with us? He did not want to leave his ship, he couldn't go back empty-handed. "They'll make short work of me if I come back empty-handed." And then that childish, foolhardy idea:
"Should desperate circumstances compel me to abandon ship I shall make for the land which we have discovered." Lately, I think, he had that land on the brain. We sighted it in April 1913.

Monday, July 13. To E.S.-E. the sea is free of ice right up to the horizon. Ah, *St. Maria,* this is where we could do with you, my beauty! This is where you could bowl along without using your engines!

Tuesday, July 14. Today Sotkin and Korolkov went to the tip of the island where they made a surprising discovery. Slightly inshore they saw a small mound built of stones. They were struck by its regular shape. On coming closer they saw an empty English beer bottle with a screw cap. The men quickly uncovered the mound and found an iron container under the stones. In it was a well-preserved British flag, and beneath it another bottle. This bottle had a paper pasted on it with several names and inside it was a note written in English. With some difficulty and by the joint efforts of Nils and myself, I made out that the British polar expedition led by Jackson, having sailed from Cape Flora in August 1897 had arrived at Cape Mary Harmsworth, where it had placed this flag and the note. The note said that all was well on the good ship *Windward.*

In this surprising manner all my doubts were cleared up: we were on Cape Mary Harmsworth, the south-western tip of Alexandra Land. Tomorrow we intend to go to the southern shore of the island and make for Cape Flora where this famous Englishman Jackson had his base.

Wednesday, July 15. Broke camp. We had the choice of either going all together across the glacier and dragging our baggage along or breaking up into two parties, one of which would go across the ice on skis while the other, consisting of five men, would sail along the icefield in the kayaks. We chose the latter method.

Thursday, July 16. In the morning Maxim and Nils started to bring the kayaks closer in to where we had halted, and Nils was carried out so far by the current that two men had to be sent to his aid. I looked through my binoculars and saw Nils ship his paddle and look at the approaching rescue craft with a helpless air. Nils must be very sick; it's the only way I can account for his behaviour. He acts rather strange-walks unsteadily and sits apart all the time. Today, for supper, we cooked two pochards and an eider.

Friday, July 17. Dirty weather. Still sitting on Cape Grant, waiting for the shore party. Weather cleared up at night. E.N.-E. ahead, seemingly quite near, we can see a rocky island across the icefield.

Can this be Northbrook, where Cape Flora is? We shall soon know whether I was right in trying to make this cape. Twenty years is a long time. There may be nothing left of Jackson's log houses. But what else could we do? Make a wide detour? Would my wretched, sick companions have stood it, their clothes, soaked in blubber oil, all in rags and full of vermin?

Saturday, July 18. Tomorrow, weather permitting, we will push on. I cannot wait any longer. Nils can hardly walk and Korolkov is almost as bad. Dunayev complains of pains in his legs, too, but he does not show signs of that apathy and exhaustion which frightens me in Nils and Korolkov. What can be delaying the walking party? In any case we cannot stay here any longer-it spells death.

Monday, July 20. Bell Island. When we stepped out of the kayaks we saw that Nils could not walk any more. He fell down and tried to crawl forward on all fours. We put up a tent of sorts, carried Nils into it and wrapped him up in our only blanket. He kept trying to crawl away, but then quieted down. Nils is a Dane. During his two years' service aboard the *St. Maria* he learned to speak Russian well. But since yesterday he has forgotten his Russian. What strikes me most of all is the blank, fear-stunned look in his eyes, the eyes of a man who has lost his reason. We boiled some broth and gave him half a cupful. He drank it and lay down. I feel sorry for him. He is a good sailor, a sensible, hard-working man. All went to sleep, but I took my rifle and went to look at Cape Flora from the cliffs.

Tuesday, July 21. Nils died in the night. He had not even thrown off the blanket we had wrapped him in. His face was serene, undistorted by death agonies. Within a couple of hours we carried out our dead comrade and laid him on a sledge. The grave was a shallow one, as the earth was frozen hard. No one shed a tear over this solitary, remote grave. His death did not come as a surprise to us and we took it as a matter of course. This was not callousness or heartlessness on our part. It was the abnormal torpor one feels in the face of death, a sense of irrevocable doom that haunted every one of us. It was with something akin to animosity that we now kept glancing at the next "candidate", Dunayev, trying to guess whether he would "make it or not". One of his mates even shouted at him angrily: "What are you sitting there like a wet hen? Want to go after Nils? Come on, get some driftwood, stir your stumps!" When Dunayev humbly rose to go, they shouted after him: "Now, no buckling, mind!" There was no resentment against Dunayev. Even the driftwood was of no importance now. It was resentment against the sickness which had claimed their comrade, it was a call to fight death to one's last breath. Buckling, when your legs give way under you as though paralysed, is very characteristic. After that your tongue refuses to obey you. The sick man articulates his words carefully, then gives it up in some confusion when he sees that nothing comes of it.

Wednesday, July 22. At three o'clock we started out for Cape Flora. My thoughts again were with Captain Tatarinov. I have no further doubt now that he was somewhat obsessed with this new land we had discovered. Lately he kept reproaching himself for not having sent out a party to explore it. He spoke about it also in Ms farewell speech to us. I

shall never forget that leavetaking. That pale, inspired face with its inward look! How different from that once ruddy-faced, cheerful man with his fund of yarns and funny stories, the idol of his crew, a man who always came to his task, however difficult, with a joke on his lips! Nobody moved after his speech. He stood there with closed eyes, as though nerving himself for the last word of farewell. But instead of words, a low moan broke from his lips and tears glistened in the corners of his eyes. He began jerkily, then continued more calmly: "We all find it hard to say goodbye to friends with whom we have lived through two years of struggle and work. But we must remember that, although the expedition's main task has not been accomplished, we have done a good deal. By the labours of Russian men, some very important pages have been written in the history of the North, and Russia can be proud of them. It is up to us to show ourselves worthy successors of the Russian explorers of the North. And if we perish, our discovery must not perish with us. So let our friends report that through the efforts of our expedition an extensive territory, which we have named Maria Land, has been added to Russia." He stopped, then embraced each of us in turn and said: "I want to say to you not 'goodbye', but 'till we meet again'."

Thursday, July 30. There are only eight of us left now-four in the kayaks and four somewhere on Alexandra Land.

Saturday, August 1. This is what happened today: we were within two or three miles of Cape Flora when a strong Northeaster rose, which quickly built up to gale force and whipped up a heavy swell. Before we knew it we lost the second kayak in the mist, the one with Dunayev and Korolkov in it. It was impossible to battle against the wind and current in this swell, so we sought the protection on one of the larger icebergs, climbed up it and dragged our kayak on to it. We planted a mast at the top of the iceberg and hoisted a flag in the hope that Dunayev would see it and follow our example. It was pretty cold, and, being rather tired, we decided to get some sleep. We put on our parkas and lay down on the top of the iceberg head-to-toe, so that Maxim's feet were in my parka, behind my back, and my feet were in Maxim's parka, behind his back. We slept soundly for some 7 or 8 hours. Our awakening was frightful. We were wakened by a terrific crash and found ourselves hurtling down. The next moment our improvised double sleeping-bag was full of water; we were submerged and making desperate efforts to get out of this treacherous bag by trying to kick each other away. We were like cats thrown into the water to be drowned. I don't remember how many seconds we threshed about in the water, but it seemed a dreadfully long time to me. Together with thoughts of rescue and death, a kaleidoscope of scenes from our voyage whirled through my head—the death of Morev, Nils and the four who had set out on foot. Now it was our turn and nobody would ever know what had happened to us. At that moment my feet found Maxim's and we kicked each other free. The next moment found us standing drenched to the skin on the under-water foot of the iceberg, fishing out of the water our boots, caps, blanket and mittens which were floating round us in the water. Our parkas were so heavy that we had to lift each one out together, and the blanket sank before we could get to it. I cudgelled my brain what to do now. We would surely freeze to death! As if in answer to our question, our kayak dropped down into the water from the top of the iceberg: either the wind had

blown it down or the ice had given way under it as it had under us. Now we knew what to do. We wrung out our socks and jackets, and put them on again, threw everything we had left into the kayak, got in and started paddling away. My God, how furiously we worked those paddles! It was this, I think, that saved us. In about six hours we approached Cape Flora...

Among the earlier entries made soon after the navigating officer had left the ship, I found an interesting chart. It had an old-fashioned look about it, and I thought it resembled the chart that was appended to Nansen's account of the voyage of the *Fram*.

But what surprised me was this: there was a chart of the drift of the *St. Maria* from October 1912 to April 1914, and the drift was shown as having taken place in the area of what was known as Petermann's Land. Who nowadays does not know that this land does not exist? But who knows that this fact was first established by Captain Tatarinov in the schooner *St. Maria'*.

What then did he accomplish, this Captain, whose name appears in no book of geography? He discovered Severnaya Zemlya and proved that Petermann's Land does not exist. He changed the map of the Arctic, yet he considered his expedition a failure.

But the most important thing was this: reading the diary for the fifth, sixth and seventh time from my own copy (with nothing now to interfere with the actual process of reading), my attention was drawn to the entries dealing with the Captain's attitude to this discovery:

"Lately he kept reproaching himself for not having sent out a party to explore it" (i.e. Severnaya Zemlya).

"If we perish, our discovery must not perish with us. So let our friends report that through the efforts of our expedition an extensive territory, which we have named Maria Land, has been added to Russia."

"Should desperate circumstances compel me to abandon ship I shall make for the land which we have discovered."

And the navigating officer called this idea childish and foolhardy.

Childish and foolhardy! The Captain's last letter which Aunt Dasha once read to me contained those two words.

"Willy-nilly, we had to abandon our original plan of making Vladivostok along the coast of Siberia. But this proved to be a blessing in disguise. It had given me quite a new idea. I hope it does not strike you, as it does some of my companions, as childish and foolhardy."

The page had ended with those words and the next sheet was missing. Now I knew what that idea was: he wanted to leave ship and head for that land. The expedition, which had been the principal aim of his life, had been a failure. He could not return home "empty-handed". His one desire was to reach that land, and it was clear to me that if any trace of the expedition were to be found anywhere, then it was in that land that it had to be sought.

Would I ever find out what had happened to this man, who had entrusted me, as it were, with the task of telling the story of his life and death? Had he left the ship to explore the land he had discovered, or had he died from hunger along with his men, leaving his schooner, icebound off the coast of Yamal, to drift for years along Nansen's route to Greenland with a dead crew? Or, one cold stormy night, when stars,

moon and Northern Lights were blotted out, had the ship been crushed in the ice, her masts, topmasts and yards crushing to the deck, killing the men there, while the hull groaned and creaked in its death throes, and in some two hours the blizzard had cloaked the scene of the disaster in snow?

Or were men from the *St. Maria* still alive somewhere, on some Arctic desert island, men who could tell the story of the ship's fate and the fate of her Captain? Had not six Russian sailors lived for several years in an uninhabited corner of Spitzbergen, hunting bears and seals, eating their flesh, wearing their skins and using them to cover the floor of their hut, which they had built from ice and snow?

But how could they? Twenty years had passed since that "childish", "foolhardy" idea of abandoning ship and striking out for Maria Land had been voiced. Had they made for this land? Had they reached it?

CHAPTER EIGHT

"I THINK WE HAVE MET"

Volodya, the doctor's son, called for me at seven in the morning. Half awake, I heard him down below scolding his dogs Buska and Toga. We had arranged the day before to visit the local fur-breeding farm and he had suggested making the trip by dog-sledge.

When we had settled in the sledge he shouted briskly, like your true Nenets, "mush, mush!" and the dogs started off at a spanking speed. The snow dust struck my face, stinging my eyes and taking my breath away. When the sledge bounced over a snowdrift I clutched Volodya, who looked round in surprise. I let go of him and started to bounce up and down in my straps, which, I thought, were not drawn tight enough.

Whoosh! Without warning the dogs stopped dead in their tracks, all but catapulting me out of the sledge. Nothing alarming. It appeared that we had to turn off here, and Volodya had stopped the dogs to change direction. His dogs had one fault-they couldn't take a turning on the run.

We continued down the new track and after a while the dogs spurted forward and began to bark. Hark!—what was that? All of a sudden, as if in answer to the dogs a chorus of barks came from behind a clump of trees, first remote, then nearer and nearer. It was a long-drawn-out, wild, confused barking, which sent a chill up your spine.

"Volodya, why are there so many dogs here?"

"They're not dogs, they're foxes."

"Why do they bark?"

"They're cannies!" Volodya shouted over his shoulder. "They bark!"

I had, of course, seen ordinary foxes, but Volodya explained that this farm was breeding silvery-black foxes, and this was something quite different. There were no foxes like it anywhere else in the world. A

white-tipped tail was considered beautiful, but here they were trying to breed a fox without a single white hair.

In short, he really got me interested, and I was very annoyed when, some fifteen minutes later, we arrived at the farm gate to find a watchman there with a rifle slung over his shoulder who told us that the farm was not open for inspection.

"What is it open for?"

"For scientific work," said the watchman.

"Could we see the director?"

"The director is out."

"Who's in charge?"

"The Senior Research Associate," the watchman said impressively.

"Ah, that's the man we want."

I left Volodya at the gate and went in search of the S.R.A. Obviously not many people came to the farm, for only a single narrow track ran through the snow-covered courtyard to the house which the watchman had pointed out to me. After shaking the snow off my boots I opened the door and found myself in a large low-ceilinged room which led into another larger room where a man was sitting at a desk. He got up on seeing me. He looked at me in a way that was very familiar and reminded me of Valya Zhukov. The same amiable, slightly mad expression. He even had the same dark down on his cheeks, only thicker and blacker. Could this be Valya? I voiced the thought:

"Valya! Is that you?"

"What?" he said in a bewildered way, cocking his head to one side as Valya used to do.

"Valya, you sonofagun!" I said, my heart giving an enormous bound. "What's the matter? Don't you recognise me?"

He smiled vaguely and gave me his hand.

"Why, yes," he said in an artificial tone. "I think we have met."

"Think? You think we have met!"

I grabbed his arm and dragged him to the window.

"Look, you cow!"

He looked and gave a vague little laugh.

"Dammit, don't you recognise me?" I said with amazement.

He blinked. Then the vagueness left his face, leaving a real, true Valya which you could confuse with no one else in the world.

"Sanya!" he yelled with a gasp. "Is that you?"

We embraced and started off arm in arm. In the doorway he kissed me again.

"So it's you? I'll be jiggered! When did you arrive?"

"I didn't arrive, I live here."

"What d'you mean?"

"What I say. I've been here six months."

"No, really?" Valya muttered. "But of course, I'm seldom in town, or I might have run into you. H'm... Six months!"

He led me into another room, which looked much the same as the one we had just left, except that it had a bed in it and a gun hanging on the wall. The other room was his study and this was his bedroom. Somewhere nearby there was a laboratory, judging by the stink in the house. It struck me as funny how this animal smell went with Valya, with his absent-looking eyes, his shock of hair and that down on his

cheeks. Valya had always carried the smell of some animal around with him.

I reminded myself that I had left Volodya at the gate, and Valya sent a junior research associate for him. This junior, by the way, was some thirty years older than Valya, an imposing bearded figure with a queer thin nose. Apparently, he had made an impression on Volodya, because they did not come in until half an hour later, chatting in a friendly fashion, and Volodya announced that Pavel Petrovich-that was the man's name-had promised to show him the fox kitchen.

"And even treat him to a fox dinner," said Pavel Petrovich.

"Show him the 'jungle'," Valya said.

Volodya flushed and held his breath when he heard the word. Jungle-it sounded so thrilling.

They went out, leaving Valya and me alone together. We started reminiscing about Korablev and the boys. After a while Valya reminded himself that the fox cubs had to be given their medicine.

"Have somebody give it to them."

"No, I've got to do that myself," Valya said. "It's Vigantol, for rickets. You wait here, I won't be long."

I did not want to part from him and we went off together.

CHAPTER NINE

GOOD NIGHT!

Valya persuaded me to stay the night, and we telephoned the doctor to say that Volodya would be returning home by himself.

We took a walk in the woods, then went back to Valya's room and had a drink together. He told me that he had seldom left the farm during the last six months. He was engaged in interesting work-examining the stomachs of sables in order to discover what they ate. He had several stomachs of his own, from the farm and some two hundred or so presented to him by some animal reservation. And he had discovered a very interesting thing: that when hunting small furbearers it was important to spare the ground squirrel, and this was the sable's staple diet.

I listened to him in silence. We were quite alone, in an empty house, and the room was absolutely bare—the big, comfortless room of a lonely man.

"Yes, that's interesting," I said, when Valya had finished. "So the sable needs ground squirrels to live on? Well, well! And d'you know what you need most of all? What you're badly in need of? A wife!"

Valya blinked, then laughed.

"What makes you think that?" he said irresolutely.

"Because you live like a dog. And d'you know what kind of wife you need? One who'd bring you sandwiches in your lab and wouldn't be demanding on your attention."

"I don't know," Valya muttered. "I'll marry eventually I suppose. When I'm through with my thesis I'll be quite free. I'll soon be going back to Moscow, you know. What about you?"

"What about me?"

"Why don't you marry?"

After a pause, I said: "Oh, it's different with me. I lead a different life—here today and at the other end of the earth tomorrow. I can't marry."

"No, you ought to marry too," Valya retorted , then, struck by a sudden thought, he added: "I say, do you remember coming to see me at the Zoo with Katya, who brought a friend along? What was her name? A tall girl with plaits."

His face assumed such a gentle, childish expression that I could not help laughing.

"Yes, of course. Kiren! Good-looking, isn't she?"

"Very," said Valya. "Very."

He wanted to give me his bed, but I preferred a shakedown on the floor. There were plenty of cots in the house, but I had always liked sleeping on the floor.

I did not feel like sleeping that night. We talked about everything under the sun, then harked back to the subject of Korablev.

"You know." Valya said, "I may be wrong, of course, but I have an idea that he was a little in love with Maria Vasilievna. Don't you think so?"

"Maybe."

"Because a very odd thing happened. One day, when I called to see him, I saw her portrait on his desk. I asked him something, because I happened to be going to Tatarinovs the next day, and he suddenly started talking about her. Then he fell silent, and he had such a look on his face ... I decided there was something wrong there."

"You don't say so?" I said with annoyance. "What the hell—you must be living up in the clouds. A little in love! Why, he couldn't live without her! And all this was going on right under your nose. But you were busy with your snakes then!"

"No, really? Poor devil!"

"Poor devil's right."

After a pause I asked:

"Were you often at the Tatarinovs?"

"Not very often. About three times."

"How are they getting on?"

Valya rose on his elbow. He seemed to be trying to see my face in the dark, though I had spoken quite calmly.

"They're all right. Nikolai Antonich is a professor now."

"Is that so! What does he read?"

"Pedology," Valya said. "And a highly respected professor, I'd have you know. As a matter of fact..."

"As a matter of fact what?"

"I think you were mistaken about him."

"Do you?"

"Yes," Valya said with conviction. "You were wrong about him. Just look how he treats his pupils, for instance. Why, he's ready to go through fire and water for them. Romashov told me that last year—"

"Romashov? Where does he come in?"

"What d'you mean? It was he who took me to the Tatarinovs."

"How does he come to be there?"

"He's Nikolai Antonich's assistant. He's there every day. He's an intimate friend of the family."

"Wait a minute, what are you talking about? I don't understand. You mean Romashka?"

"Yes, of course," said Valya. "Only nobody calls him that now. By the way, I believe he's going to marry Katya."

I felt a sudden stab through the heart and sat up. Valya sat up, too, and stared at me blankly.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Oh, of course. Damn it. I'd quite forgotten!"

He muttered something, then looked around with an air of bewilderment and got out of his bed.

"Well, not exactly going to marry—"

"Finish what you were going to say," I said quite calmly.

"What d'you mean 'finish'?" Valya stammered. "I didn't say anything. It was just my idea, it doesn't mean anything. I get funny ideas sometimes, you know."

"Valya!"

"I don't know anything!" Valya said in desperation. "It's only an idea. I get some crazy ideas sometimes. You don't have to believe me!"

"You have an idea that Romashov is going to marry Katya?"

"Hell, no! I tell you, no! Nothing of the sort! He started to dress up, that's all."

"Valya!"

"I swear I don't know anything more."

"Has he talked to you about it?"

"Well, yes. He told me he'd been saving up money since he was thirteen and had now taken and spent it all in six months. Has that got anything to do with it, you think?"

I was no longer listening to him. I lay on the floor, staring out at the sky, and it seemed to me that I was lying in some deep abyss and the whole world was humming and talking above me, while I was lying all alone with nobody to say a word to. The sky was still dark and the stars still visible, but already a faint, distant light was hovering over the earth, and I was thinking-here we had spent the whole night talking and this is where it has led us!

"Good night!"

"Good night!" I answered mechanically.

I wished now I had left with Volodya. A choking sensation came into my throat and I felt like getting up and going out into the fresh air, but I lay where I was, merely turning over onto my stomach with my face in my hands. So that was that! Incredible though it was, I could not stop thinking about it for a minute. The incredible thing about it was Romashka, for I could not imagine him and Katya together. But what made me think she had not forgotten me all this time? After all, we hadn't met for so many years.

Valya was asleep and my going out would probably have awakened him. But I did not feel like talking to him any more, and so I remained lying on my stomach, then on my back, then again on my stomach with my face in my hands.

Afterwards—it must have been round about seven—the telephone rang and Valya jumped up, sleepy-eyed, and ran into the next room dragging the blanket behind him.

"It's for you," he said, returning a moment later.

"Me?"

I threw my coat over my shoulders and went to the telephone.

"Sanya!" It was the doctor speaking. "Where've you disappeared to? I'm phoning from the Executive Committee office. I'm handing over the receiver."

"Comrade Grigoriev," said another voice. It was the Zapolarie police chief. "An urgent matter. You have to fly to Camp Vanokan with Doctor Pavlov. Do you know Ledkov?"

Did I know him! He was a member of the regional Executive Committee and one of the most respected men in the North country. Everyone knew him.

"He's wounded and needs urgent medical aid. When can you fly out?"

"Within an hour," I said.

"And you, doctor?"

I did not catch the doctor's answer.

"Instruments all in order? Good. I'll see you in an hour's time then, at the airfield."

CHAPTER TEN

THE FLIGHT

These were the people aboard the plane on the morning of March 5th when we took off and headed northeast: the doctor, anxious-looking, wearing dark glasses, which changed his appearance surprisingly, my air mechanic Luri, one of the most popular men in Zapolarie or wherever else in the Arctic he happened to appear for at least three or four days, and myself.

This was my fifteenth flight in the North, but my first flight to a district where they had never seen a plane before. Camp Vanokan was a very remote spot on one of the tributaries of the Pyasina. The doctor had been on the Pyasina before and said it should not be difficult to find Vanokan.

A member of the E.C. had been wounded. It had happened while he was out hunting—so it was believed. Anyway, the doctor and I had been asked to ascertain in what circumstances this had happened. We should arrive at Vanokan about three o'clock, before it grew dark. For an emergency, though, we took with us provisions for three men to last thirty days, a primus-stove, a flare gun with a supply of flares, a shotgun and cartridges, spades, a tent and an axe.

As for the weather, all I knew was that it was fine at Zapolarie but what it was like along our route I had no idea. There was no time to get a report and no one to give it.

And so all was in order when we took off from Zapolarie and headed northeast. All was in order, and I was no longer thinking about what I had heard from Valya the night before. Below me I could see the Yenisei—a broad, white band between white banks, along which ran a forest, now closing in, now drawing back. I had a slight headache after that sleepless night and sometimes there was a ringing in my ears, but only in my ears, for the engine was working splendidly.

After a while I left the line of the river, and the tundra began-a level, endless, snowy plain unrelieved by a single black dot, nothing whatever to catch the eye...

Why had I been so sure that this could never happen? I should have written to her when she sent me her regards through Sanya. But I had not wanted to make any advances to her until I had proved that I was blameless. You must never be too sure of a woman's love, however. Sure of her loving you in spite of everything.

Snow, snow, snow, wherever you looked. There were clouds ahead, and I climbed and drove into them. Better to fly blind than have this endless, dismal, white waste under you which distorted perspective.

I bore Romashka no particular malice, though if he had been here at the moment I should probably have killed him. I bore him no malice, simply because it was impossible to associate that man with Katya, that man with the scruffy thatch on his head and the flaming ears, who had decided at the age of thirteen to get rich and was always saving and counting his money. His wanting to marry her was just as senseless as his wanting, say, to suddenly become a different person other than himself, someone with Katya's candour and beauty.

We passed through the cloud-bank and entered another, beyond which snow was falling. The snow glittered somewhere down below under the sun, which was hidden from us by clouds.

My feet had begun to grow chilled and I regretted that I had put on a pair of fur boots which were a little too tight on me. I should have put on larger ones.

So my mind was made up—1 was going to Moscow. I would have to let her know I was coming, though. I must write her a letter, a letter that she would read and never forget.

We emerged from the layer of dark clouds, and the sun, as always happens when you emerge, seemed brighter than ever-but I still could not decide whether to begin my letter simply with "Katya" or "Dear Katya".

There were the mountains. They rested on the clouds, lit up by the sun, some bare, others covered with dazzling snow. Through the rare rifts in the clouds gorges could be seen, long picturesque gorges, spelling certain death in the event of a forced landing. I could not help thinking of this, then I went on composing my letter, continuing this until I was compelled to give my attention to other, more urgent matters.

There did not seem to be any wind, yet huge cloudlike caps of snow started to break away from the mountain tops and whirled up and up. Within ten minutes it was impossible to imagine that there had just been sun and sky above us. There was now neither earth, nor sun, nor sky. All was chaos and confusion. The wind caught up with us and

struck us first from the left, then in front, then from the left again, blowing us off course, to where there was a mist and falling snow—small, brittle snow which stung your face and pierced through every buttonhole and gap in your clothing. Then night closed in. You could not see a thing around you, and for a time I flew the plane in utter darkness. I seemed to be running into walls, for all around us were real walls of snow bolstered up on all sides by the wind. At one moment I broke through them, at the next retreated and broke through again, or found myself far beneath them. It was a frightening experience to feel the plane suddenly dropping a hundred and fifty or two hundred metres, without your knowing how high the mountains were, as they were not marked on my map. All I could do was to wheel round in a half-circle and go back to the Yenisei. I would see the backs there, fly over the high bluffs and steer clear of the blizzard, or, if it came to the worst, return to Zapolarie.

Turning round was easier said than done. The plane began to shudder when I pressed my left foot down and we were flung aside again, but I continued swinging her round. I believe I said something to the machine. It was at that moment that I felt something was going wrong with the engine. This was too bad, because we still had those gorges beneath us, which I had been hoping we had left far behind. We caught glimpses of them here and there—long and utterly hopeless: nobody would find us there or ever know what had happened to us. I had to get away from these death traps, and I did, though I was having engine trouble and would have to put the plane down soon. I began to descend very slowly, keeping an eye on the turn indicator and thinking all the time about the ground, which was somewhere below me, though I did not know where it was or what it was like. Something was beating in my brain, like a clock ticking, and I talked loudly to myself and to the machine. But I was not afraid. I only remember feeling hot for a moment, when some great bulk swept past me. I flung the plane away from it and almost grazed the ground with my wing tip.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE BLIZZARD

I am not going to describe those three days and nights we spent in the tundra, not far from the banks of the Pyasina. One hour was like another, and only the first few minutes, when we had to make the plane fast somehow to prevent it being swept away by the blizzard, were different from the rest of the time.

Just try securing a plane down in the tundra, which is bare of vegetation, and with a force ten wind blowing! With the engine still running, we placed the plane with its tail to the wind. We thought of burying it, but the moment we touched the snow with a spade the wind blew it away. The plane was still being tossed about and we had to think

of some reliable way of anchoring it, because the wind was building up and in half an hour it would be too late. We then did a simple thing—1 recommended it to all Arctic pilots—we tied ropes to the wings and to these in turn we attached skis, suitcases, a box containing cargo, and even a funnel-in short, everything that might help snowdrifts to form rapidly around them. Within fifteen minutes snowdrifts had piled up around these objects, but in other places under the plane the snow was still being blown away.

Now we could do nothing but wait. Not a very cheerful prospect, but the only thing we could do. To wait and wait—who knows how long!

I have already mentioned that we had everything to meet the emergency of a forced landing, but what can you do with a tent, say, if a simple thing like getting out of the plane is a complicated and agonising business, which you can only bring yourself to do once a day and then only because you have to get out once a day.

So passed the first day. A little less warmth. A little more sleepy. To keep from falling asleep I try all kinds of tricks which take a lot of time doing and are of little use. I try, for instance, to light the primus-stove, while I order Luri to light the blowlamp. A difficult task! It's hard to light a primus-stove when every minute you feel your own skin from head to foot, when you suddenly feel yourself going cold somewhere deep inside your ears, as if y our eardrums were freezing and when the snow immediately plasters your face, turning it into an icy mask. Luri tries to crack jokes, but the jokes freeze in mid-air, in a fifty-degree (C.) frost and there is nothing left for him but to joke about his ability to joke under any circumstances and at any time.

So ended our first night and the night after that. A little more sleepy still. And the snow kept rushing past us until it seemed as if all the world's snow was flying past us... The thing was not to let the mechanic fall asleep. He looked the strongest of us, but turned out to be the weakest. The doctor from time to time slapped him and shook him. Then the doctor himself began to doze and I had to shake him from time to time, politely but persistently.

"Nothing of the sort, Sanya. I wasn't sleeping at all," he muttered, opening his eyes with an effort. I no longer felt sleepy. Some years later I read Stefansson's *The Friendly Arctic* and realised that it was a mistake to go without sleep for such a long time. But at that time I was inexperienced in the ways of the Arctic and believed that to fall asleep in such a situation was courting certain death.

All the same I must have fallen asleep or else I was daydreaming, seeing myself boxed up deep in the earth, because overhead I could distinctly hear a street noise and the clanging and rattling of tramcars. It wasn't very terrifying, only somewhat distressing to find myself lying in that little box all alone, unable to stir hand or foot, and I having to fly somewhere without a minute to spare. Then suddenly I found myself in a street standing before the lighted window of a shop, while inside the shop was Katya, walking calmly up and down without looking at me. It was she without a doubt, though I was a little afraid that it would afterward turn out to be someone else or that something would prevent me from speaking to her. The next moment I rushed to the door of the shop, but it was already empty and dark inside, and on the glass door hung a notice: "Closed."

I opened my eyes, then shut them again, overjoyed at the sight that met them! The blizzard had died down. The snow no longer blinded us,

but lay on the ground. Above it were the sun and sky, the immeasurably vast sky that one can only find at sea or in the tundra. Against this background of snow and sky, within two hundred paces of the plane, stood a man. He held a reindeer guiding pole in his hands and behind him stood reindeer harnessed to a sledge. Farther out, as though faintly etched, rose two little snow hills—without a doubt Nenets *chooms* - skin dwellings. This was the dark mass which I had shied away from when landing. They were now snowed up and only the conical open tops showed black. Around the *chooms* stood people, adults and children. They stood perfectly motionless, gazing at our aeroplane.

CHAPTER TWELVE

WHAT IS A PRIMUS-STOVE?

I never thought that thrushing one's feet into a fire could be such a joy. But it is sheer, unalloyed bliss! You feel the warmth flowing into your body, rising higher and higher, and at last, slowly, softly, warming the heart.

I felt nothing else, thought of nothing else. The doctor was muttering something behind me, but I was not listening to him, and did not care a hang about the spirits he was having rubbed into my feet.

The smoke of the tundra shrub they were burning, which is like the smoke of damp pinewood, hung over the hearth, but I did not care a hang for this smoke either—all I cared for was the warmth. I was warm—it was almost unbelievable!

The Nentsi were squatting round the fire and looking at us. Their faces were grave. The doctor was trying to tell them something in Nenets. They listened attentively and nodded understandingly. And then it transpired that they had understood nothing, and the doctor, with a gesture of annoyance, began to act the scene of a wounded man and an aeroplane flying to his aid. It would have been very funny had I been able to keep awake for as long as a minute at a stretch. He lay down, clutching his belly, then jumped up and rushed forward with raised arms. Suddenly he turned to me, saying in amazement:

"Would you believe it! They know all about it. They even know where Ledkov was wounded. It was attempted murder. Somebody shot at him."

He began speaking in Nenets again, and I guessed, through my drowsiness, that he was asking them whether they knew who had fired the shot.

"They say the man who fired the shot went home. Went home to think. He will think a day, two days. But he will come back."

I couldn't fight off sleep any longer. Everything began to swim before me, and I could have laughed through sheer joy at the thought of being able to go to sleep at last.

When I woke up it was quite light. A skin flap had been drawn aside and I saw the doctor standing in a dazzling triangle of light with the Nentsi sitting on their haunches around him. Some way off I could see the plane, and all this was so strongly reminiscent of a familiar film scene that I was afraid it would soon flash past and disappear. But it wasn't a film shot. It was the doctor asking the Nentsi where Vanokan was.

"There?" he shouted irritably, pointing south. "There, there!" the Nentsi cried. "There?" he asked, pointing east. "There."

Then the Nentsi all began pointing to the southeast and the doctor drew a huge map of the Arctic coastline in the snow. But that did not help matters, because the Nentsi regarded the map as a work of art, and one of them, quite a young fellow, drew a figure of a reindeer beside the map to show that he, too, could draw.

The first thing to do was to dig the aeroplane out of the snow. And we should never have been able to cope with this task if the Nentsi had not helped us. I had never seen snow which looked so little like snow. We hacked it with axes and spades and cut it with knives. When the last snow block had been cut out and thrown aside, we untied the fastenings, which I had recommended to the notice of Arctic pilots. Water to warm up the engine was being heated in all available pots and kettles. The young Nenets, who had drawn the reindeer in the snow and now volunteered to act as our navigator to show us the way to Vanokan, had said goodbye to his weeping wife, and this was very amusing, as his wife was wearing trousers of reindeer-skin and only the bits of coloured cloth in her hair distinguished her from the men. The sun came out from behind the high fleecy clouds-a sign of good weather-and I told the doctor, who was putting eye drops into somebody's eyes, that it was time to "get going". At that moment Luri came up to me and said that we could not take off.

A strut in the undercarriage was broken-no doubt this had happened when I shied clear of the tent-dwelling in landing. We hadn't noticed this until the Nentsi had cleared the snow away from the undercarriage.

It was four clear days and nights since we had left Zapolarie. No doubt they would be looking for us and would eventually find us, though the blizzard had carried us off course. They would find us-but could you be certain? Perhaps it was already too late for us to fly to Vanokan, unless we were flying to fetch a corpse?

This was my first real test in the North, and it was with dismay that I thought of having to return empty-handed without having done anything. Or, worse still, they would find me in the tundra, helpless as a puppy, beside a crippled aeroplane. What was to be done?

I called the doctor and asked him to gather the Nentsi.

It was an unforgettable meeting, the one we held in the *choom* around the fire, or rather around the smoke, which went out through a round hole above our heads. I can't make out how such a crowd of people could pack themselves into that *choom*\ A reindeer had been slaughtered in our honour, and the Nentsi were eating it raw, holding the meat in their teeth with one hand and cutting slices off close to their lips with amazing dexterity. It was a wonder they did not snip off the tips of their noses while they were at it!

Though I am not squeamish, I tried not to look at the way they dipped these strips in a cup of blood and dispatched them amid a smacking of lips.

"It's bad," I began my speech, "that we have taken on ourselves to help a wounded man, a respected man, and here we are, sitting with you these last four days, and unable to help him. Please, translate that, Doctor."

The doctor translated it.

"But what's still worse is that a lot of time has passed and we are still far away from Vanokan and don't even know exactly which way to fly—to the north or south, the east or west."

The doctor translated.

"Worse still, our aeroplane is damaged. And we can't mend it without your help."

The Nentsi began talking all together, but the doctor raised a hand and they fell silent. I had already noticed that they treated him with great respect.

"We would have fared badly but for you," I went on. "Without you we would have frozen to death, without you we could not have coped with the snow, under which our aeroplane was buried. Translate that, please."

The doctor translated.

"And one more request. We need a piece of wood. We need a small, but very strong piece of wood, a metre long. We shall then be able to mend the aeroplane and fly on further to help that worthy man."

I tried to speak as though I were mentally translating back from Nenets into Russian.

"Of course, I understand that wood is a very rare and precious thing. I would like to give you very much money for that piece of wood a metre long, but I have no money. I can offer you our primus-stove instead."

Luri-we had arranged this beforehand-pulled the stove out from under his anorak and held it up.

"You know, of course, what a primus-stove is. It's a machine that heats water, cooks meat and boils tea. How long does it take to start a fire? Half an hour. But a primus you can light in one minute. On a primus you can even bake pies. It's a splendid thing, a primus, a useful thing for the household."

Luri pumped it up and applied a match to it, and the flame shot up almost to the ceiling. But the damned thing, as if on purpose, wouldn't light, and we had to make believe that it was not supposed to light right away. This was no easy thing, considering that I had just said that lighting it was the work of a moment.

"Give us a piece of strong wood a metre long and we'll give you this primus-stove in exchange."

I was a little afraid the Nentsi would be offended by so modest a gift, but they weren't. They looked gravely at the primus in utter silence. Luri kept pumping it until the burner was red-hot and red sparks started to fly round it. Frankly, at that moment, out there in the wild remote tundra, in this Nenets *choom,* the thing looked even to me a live, burning, buzzing miracle! All sat silent, gazing at it with genuine respect.

Then an old man with a long pipe in his mouth, and a woman's shawl tied over his head, which in no way detracted from *his* dignity of mien, rose and said something in Nenets-it sounded to me like one very long sentence. He addressed himself to the doctor, but was replying to me. And this was how the doctor translated him:

"There are three ways of fighting smoke: by screening the smoke-hole on the weather side, which will make it draw better; by raising the *nyuk,* that is, the skin which serves as a door; by making a hole over the door to let the smoke out. But to receive a guest we have only one way-by giving him whatever he wants. Just now we shall eat reindeer and sleep. Afterwards we shall bring you all the wood we can find in our *chooms*. As for this magnificent primus, you may do whatever you wish with it."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE OLD BOAT-HOOK

And so, no sooner was the reindeer eaten raw, head, ears, eyes and all, than the Nentsi started to drag out all the wooden things they possessed. A hollowed-out plate, a hook for hanging pots, some sort of weaving device in the shape of a board with round holes along the sides, sledge runners and skis.

"No good?"

They were surprised.

"But it's strong wood, it will last a hundred years."

They even dragged up a chair-back, which had found its way into the tundra God knows how. Our future navigator brought a god-a real idol, decorated with bits of coloured cloth, with a bullet-head and a nail driven in where a man has his navel.

"No good? But it's strong wood, it will last a hundred years."

To tell the truth, I felt ashamed of my primus when I saw this Nenets, after saying something sharply to his poor, tearful wife, bring out a tin-bound chest, which was evidently the show-piece in an otherwise empty *choom*. He came up to me, looking very pleased and deposited the chest in the snow.

"Take this chest," the doctor translated. "It has four strong planks. I am a Komsomol member, I don't need anything, I spit on your primus!"

I'm not sure the doctor translated this last sentence correctly. In any case, it was a fine action, and I wrung a young man's hand.

Have you ever felt your mind occupied by a single idea to the exclusion of all else, and then, all of a sudden, a storm bursts upon your life and you instantly forget what you were striving after only a moment ago with all your soul?

That was what happened to me when I saw an old brass-tipped boat-hook lying in the snow among some poles which were used to build tent dwellings.

Of course, the whole thing was bizarre, beginning from the moment that I started my lecture on the primus with the Nentsi listening to me gravely, and between us, as in a dream, a column of smoke rising up straight as though made of long grey ribbons.

Strange were those wooden household articles lying in the snow round the aeroplane. Strange, that sixty-year-old Nenets with his pipe in

his mouth who issued a command to an old woman, and she brought out to us a piece of walrus bone.

But strangest of all was this boat-hook. There was hardly a thing in the world stranger than this.

At that moment Luri put his head out of the cockpit and hailed me, and I answered him from somewhere away, from that distant world into which this thing had suddenly transported me.

What was this boat-hook, then? Nothing much! Just an old brass hook on a pole. But on this old brass, now turned green, were clearly engraved the words: "Schooner *St. Maria"*.

I looked back. Luri was still looking out of the cockpit, and he was undoubtedly Luri, with that beard of his, which I made fun of every day because he had grown it in imitation of the well-known Arctic airman F., and it did not in the least suit his young, vivacious face.

Some distance away, outside the farthest *choom,* stood the doctor, surrounded by the Nentsi.

Everything was in its place, just as it had been a moment ago. But before me lay the boat-hook with the words "Schooner *St. Maria"* engraved upon it.

"Luri," I said with deadly calm, "come here."

"Found something?" Luri shouted from the cockpit.

He jumped down, came up to me and started blankly at the boat-hook.

"Read that!"

Luri read it.

"It's from a ship," he said. "The schooner *St. Maria."*

"That can't be! It can't be, Luri!"

I picked up the boat-hook, cradling it in my arms like a child, and Luri must have thought I had gone mad, because he muttered something and ran to the doctor as fast as his legs could carry him. The doctor came up with an anxious look, took my head between slightly trembling hands and gazed into my eyes.

"Oh, go to hell!" I said with annoyance. "You think I'm off my rocker? Nothing of the sort. Doctor, this boat-hook is from off the *St. Maria'."*

The doctor removed his spectacles and began to study the boat-hook.

"The Nentsi must have found it on Severnaya Zemlya," I went on excitedly. "Not on Severnaya Zemlya, of course, but somewhere along the coast. Do you realise what this means, Doctor?"

By this time the Nentsi had gathered around, looking on impassively. This might have been the thousandth time they were seeing me showing the boat-hook to the doctor, shouting and getting worked up.

The doctor asked whose hook it was, and an old Nenets with an inscrutable, deeply-lined face, which looked as though carved out of wood, stepped forward and said something in Nenets.

"What does he say. Doctor? Where did he get this boat-hook?"

"Where did you get this boat-hook?" the doctor asked in Nenets.

The Nenets answered.

"He says he found it."

"Where?"

"In a boat," the doctor translated.

"In a boat? Where did he find the boat?"

"On the beach," the doctor translated.

"What beach?"

"The Taimyr."

"Doctor, the Taimyr!" I yelled in such a voice that it brought the old anxious look back into his face. "Taimyr! The coast nearest to Severnaya Zemlya! And where's the boat?"

"There is no more boat," the doctor translated. "Only a bit of it."

"What bit?"

"A bit of boat."

"Show me!"

Luri drew the doctor aside and they stood whispering together while the old man went to fetch the bit of boat. Apparently Luri still believed that my mind was unhinged.

The Nenets reappeared a few minutes later with a piece of tarpaulin—evidently the boat he had found on the coast of the Taimyr Peninsula had been made of tarpaulin.

"Not for sale," the doctor translated.

"Doctor, ask him if there were any other things in the boat? If there were, what things and what became of them?"

"There were some things," the doctor translated. "He doesn't know what became of them. It was a long time ago. Maybe as long as ten years. He says he was out hunting, and saw a sledge standing. On the sledge stood a boat and there were things in the boat. A gun was there, a bad one, couldn't shoot, no cartridges. Skis were there, bad ones. A man was there."

"A man?"

"Wait a minute, I may have got it wrong." The doctor hastily put his question again to the Nenets.



"Yes, one man," he repeated. "Dead, of course. Face eaten away by bears. He was lying in the boat too. That's all."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing."

"Doctor, ask him whether he searched the man, was there anything in his pockets-papers, documents, maybe."

"There were."

"Where are they?"

"Where are they?" the doctor asked.

The Nenets shrugged. The question sounded rather silly to him.

"Is the boat-hook the only thing that was left? He must have been wearing something. What happened to his clothes?"

"No clothes."

"How's that?"

"Very simple," the doctor said tartly. "Or do you suppose he purposely kept them on the off chance of your dropping down on him from the blue some day with your aeroplane? Ten years! And probably another ten since he died!"

"Don't be angry. Doctor. It's all clear. The thing is to put this story down in writing and have you certify that you heard it with your own ears. Ask him what his name is."

"What's your name?" the doctor asked.

"Ivan Vilka."

"How old?"

"A hundred," the Nenets replied.

We were silent, but Luri held his sides with laughter.

"How old?" the doctor queried.

"A hundred years," Ivan Vilka repeated doggedly in pure Russian.

All the time while his story was being recorded in the *choom* he kept repeating that he was a hundred. He was probably less, at least he did not look a hundred. Yet the closer I studied that inscrutable wooden face, the more was it brought home to me that he was really very old. He was proud of his hundred years and persisted in repeating it until he was satisfied that we had recorded in the written statement:
"Hunter Ivan Vilka, a hundred years old."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

VANOKAN

To this day it remains a mystery to me where the Nentsi got that length of log from which we made the strut we needed. They went off on skis during the night, probably to some neighbouring nomad camp, and when, next morning, we came out of the *choom,* where I had spent that I would hardly call the most restful night of my life, this piece of cedar wood lay at the entrance.

Indeed, it had been anything but a cheerful night. The doctor slept by the fire, the long ends of his cap, tied over his head, sticking comically over his anorak like a pair of hare's ears. Luri tossed about and coughed. I could not sleep. A Nenets woman sat by a cradle, and I lay a long time listening to the monotonous tune which she was singing with a sort of apathetic abandon. The same words were repeated every minute until it seemed to me that the whole song consisted of just those two or three words. The baby had long ago fallen asleep, but she kept on singing.

The feeling I had experienced during my conversation with Valya came back to me, and with such force that I wanted to get up and leave the *choom,* not to have to listen to this dolorous song. But I did not get up. The woman's song gradually grew slower and quieter and then stopped altogether. She was asleep. The whole world was asleep, except me. I lay in the dark, a poignant sense of loneliness and mortification creeping about my heart. Why did I have to make this discovery when all was over, when there was nothing more between us and never would be, and we could meet, if ever we did, as strangers? I tried to fight off

this mood of melancholy, but I could not. I tried and tried until at last I fell asleep.

By midday we had repaired the undercarriage. We whittled the log down to the size and shape we wanted it and fixed it in place of the strut. For greater security we tied it down with ropes. The plane now looked a sorry sight, like a winged bird.

It was time to take our leave. The Nentsi gathered round the plane and shook hands all round and we thanked them for their help and wished them a lucky hunting. They laughed, looking pleased. Our navigator, smiling shyly, got into the plane. I don't know what he had said to his wife at parting, but she stood near the plane, looking gay in her fur parka, embroidered along the hem with coloured cloths, with a broad belt and a hood with a huge fur frill which surrounded her face like a halo.

By force of habit I raised my hand, as though asking to be flagged off.

"So long, comrades!"

We were off!

I will not describe how we flew to Vanokan, how our navigator astonished me by his ability to read the snowy wastes beneath us as if they were a map. Over one nomad camp he asked me to stop for a while and was very disappointed to learn that this could not be done.

We found Ledkov in a bad state. I had often met him at meetings and had once even flown him from Krasnoyarsk to Igarka. I had been impressed, among other things, by his knowledge of literature. I learnt that he had graduated from the Teachers' Training College in Leningrad and was generally an educated man. Until the age of twenty-three he had been a herdsman in the tundra and the Nentsi always spoke of him with pride and affection.

He was sitting on the bed, grinding his teeth with pain. The pain would suddenly lift him up. He would hoist himself out of the bed, gripping the back of it with one hand, and throw himself into a chair. It was terrible to see that big, strong body writhing in pain. Sometimes it abated for a few minutes, and then his face would assume a normal expression. Then it would start again. He bit his upper lip and *his* eyes-the stricken eyes of a strong man fighting for self-control-would begin to squint, and the next moment he would get up on his good leg and fling himself on the bed. But even there he kept tossing about, shifting from place to place. Whether it was because the bullet had hit some nerve-knot or the wound had festered I could not say. But never had I witnessed such a harrowing scene. It made one wince to look at him as he lay writhing on the bed in a vain attempt to still the excruciating pain, then suddenly, without warning, fling himself into a chair at the bedside.

The sight was enough to make any man lose his head, but not Ivan Ivanovich. On the contrary, he seemed to have suddenly grown younger. He bunched his lips and took on the appearance of a determined young army doctor before whom everyone quails. He immediately chased everyone out of the sick-room, including the Chairman of District Executive Committee who had insisted on being present during the examination of Ledkov.

He ordered paraffin lamps to be fetched from all over the settlement—"mind they don't smoke"—and hung them round the walls, making the room brighter than anyone had ever seen in Vanokan

before. Then the door was slammed to and the sight of that dazzlingly bright room with the sick man lying on a dazzlingly white table and people in dazzlingly white gowns was shut from the astonished gaze of Vanokan.

Forty minutes later Ivan Ivanovich came out of the improvised operating theatre. The operation had just been a success, because he turned to me as he was taking off his gown and said something in Latin, then quoted Kozma Prutkov: "If you want to be happy, be .it!"

Early the next morning we left Vanokan and landed at Zapolarie three and a half hours later without further adventure.

The incident—the brilliant operation performed by the doctor under such difficult conditions, and our adventurous flight—was eventually reported in *Izvestia*. The paragraph ended with the words:

"The patient is making a rapid recovery." As a matter of fact he did recover quickly.

Luri and I received a vote of thanks and the doctor a testimonial from the Nenets National Area. The old boat-hook now hung in my room on the wall beside a large map showing the drift of the schooner *St. Maria*.

At the beginning of June I went to Moscow. Unfortunately I had very little time, having been allowed only ten days during which I had to see both to my own private affairs and to the private and public affairs of my Captain.



PART FIVE

FOR THE HEART

CHAPTER ONE

I MEET KATYA

Ten days to break one engagement and arrange another is not much, considering that I had a lot of other business to attend to in Moscow. For one thing I was to read a paper before the Geographical Society on the subject of "A Forgotten Polar Expedition", and it was not even written yet. I also had to take up with the Northern Sea Route Administration the question of organising a search for the St. Maria.

Valya had done some preliminary work for me. He had arranged with the Geographical Society, for instance, for me to read the paper. But, of course, he could not write it for me.

I telephoned Katya. She answered the phone herself.

"This is Sanya," I said.

She was silent. Then, in the most ordinary voice, she said,

"Sanya?"

"That's right."

There was another pause.

"Are you in Moscow for long?"

"No, only a few days," I replied, also trying to speak in an ordinary voice, as if I were not seeing her that very moment with the untied earflaps of her fur cap and the overcoat, wet with snow, which she had worn the last time we met, in Triumfalnaya Square.

"On leave?"

"Both on leave and on business."

It required an effort to keep from asking her: "I hear that you see quite a lot of Romashov?" I made the effort and did not ask.

"And how is Sanya?" she suddenly asked, meaning my sister. "We used to correspond, then we stopped."

We began talking about Sanya, and Katya said that a Leningrad theatre had recently come to Moscow and was presenting Gorky's *Mother,* and the programme had said that the decor was by "Artist P. Skovorodnikov".

"You don't say?"

"Very good scenery too. Daring, yet simple." We went on talking and talking about this and that in ordinary voices, until a feeling of horror came upon me at the thought that it would all end like this— with our talking ourselves out in ordinary voices, then parting and my not having any excuse to phone her again.

"Katya, I want to see you. When can you meet me?"

"As it happens, I'm free this evening."

"Nine o'clock, say?"

I waited for her to invite me home, but she did not, and we arranged to meet-but where?

"What about the public garden at Triumfalnaya?"

"That garden doesn't exist any more," Katya said coldly.

We arranged to meet in the colonnade of the Bolshoi Theatre. That was all we spoke about on the telephone, and there was no sense in my going over each word the way I did all that long day in Moscow.

I went to the offices of the Civil Aviation Board, then went to see Valya at the Zoological Institute. I must have been wool-gathering, because Valya had to repeat to me several times that tomorrow was the twenty-fifth anniversary of Korablev's teaching career and there was to be a meeting to mark the occasion at the school.

Nine o'clock found me outside the Bolshoi Theatre.

It was the same Katya with those plaits coiled round her head and the curls on her forehead, which I always remembered when I thought of her. She was paler and more grown-up, no longer that girl who had kissed me once in a public garden in Triumfalnaya Square. She had acquired a certain restraint in manner and speech. Yet it was Katya all the same, and she had not grown to resemble Maria Vasilievna as strongly as I had feared. On the contrary, her original traits of character had become more pronounced, if anything, she was even more herself than before. She was wearing a short-sleeved white silk blouse with a blue polka-dot bow pinned at the neck, and she put on a severe expression when I tried, during our conversation, to peer into her face.

Wandering about Moscow that cheerless day, we might have been conversing through a wall in different rooms, with the door being opened a little now and again and Katya peeping out to see whether it was me or not. I talked and talked—I don't remember when I ever talked so much. But all this was not what I had wanted to tell her. I told her how I had made up my "Klimov alphabet" and what a job it had been to read his diaries. I told her how we had found the old boat-hook with the inscription "Schooner *St. Maria"* on it.

But not a word was said about why I had done all this. Not a word. As though the whole thing were long since dead and buried, and there had never been the pain and love, the death of Maria Vasilievna, my jealousy of Romashka, and all the living blood that throbbed in me and Katya.

They were building the Metro in Moscow and the most familiar places were fenced off, and we had to walk the length of these fences over sagging board-walks and then turn back, because the fence ended in a

pit which had not been there yesterday and from which voices could now be heard and the noise of underground work.

Our conversation was like that too-all roundabout, hedged, with the most familiar places, known to us from childhood and school years, fenced off. We kept running into these fences, especially when we approached such dangerous ground as the subject of Nikolai Antonich.

I asked Katya whether she had received my letters—one from Leningrad and another from Balashov, and when she said she hadn't, I hinted at the possibility of their having fallen into strange hands.

"There are no strange hands in our house," Katya said sharply.

We returned to Theatre Square. It was already late in the evening, but flowers were still being sold from the stalls, and after Zapolarie it was strange to see so much of everything—people, cars, houses and electric lamps swinging this way and that.

We sat on a bench, and Katya listened to me with her chin propped up in her hand. I remembered how she had always liked to take her time settling herself comfortably the better to be able to listen. It struck me now what the change in her was. It was her eyes. They had grown sad.

It was our one good moment. Then I asked whether she remembered our last conversation in the garden in Triumfalnaya Square, but she did not answer. It was the most terrible of answers for me. It meant that the old answer: "Let's not talk about it any more", still stood.

Perhaps, if I had been able to have a good look into her eyes, I might have read more in them. But she averted them and I gave it up.

All I felt was that she was growing colder towards me with every passing minute. She nodded when I said: "I'll keep you informed." After a pause, she said:

"I wanted to tell you, Sanya, that I appreciate what you are doing. I was sure you had long forgotten the whole thing."

"As you see, I haven't."

"Do you mind if I tell Nikolai Antonich about our conversation?"

"Not at all. He'd be interested to learn about my discoveries. They concern him very closely, you know, more closely than he imagines."

They did not concern him as closely as all that and I had no grounds whatever for making such an insinuation. But I was very sore.

Katya regarded me with a thoughtful air. She seemed to be on the point of asking me something, but could not make up her mind. We said goodbye. I walked away disturbed, angry and tired, and in the hotel, for the first time in my life, I had a headache.

CHAPTER TWO

KORABLEV'S ANNIVERSARY

To celebrate the anniversary of a secondary school teacher when the school had broken up for the summer and the pupils were away struck me as being an odd idea. I told Valya as much and doubted whether anybody would come.

But I was mistaken. The school was crowded. The boys and girls were still busy decorating the staircase with branches of birch and maple. A pile of branches lay on the floor in the cloakroom and a huge figure "25" hung over the entrance to the hall where the celebration meeting was to be held. The girls were arranging festoons and everybody was busy and preoccupied. The air of festive excitement made a cheering sight.

But I was not given a chance to spend much time reminiscing. I was in uniform and in a moment found myself sunounded. Whew! An airman! I was bombarded with questions.

Then a senior form girl, who reminded me of Varya—she was just as plump and rosy—came up to me and said, blushing, that Korablev was expecting me.

He was sitting in the teachers' room, looking older, slightly bent, his hair already grey. He now resembled Mark Twain—that was it. Though he had grown older, it seemed to me that he looked sturdier than when we had last met. His moustache, though greying, was bushier than ever and the loose, soft collar revealed a strong, red neck.

"Ivan Pavlovich, my hearty congratulations!" I said, and we embraced. "Congratulations!" I said between the kisses. "I hope all your pupils will be as grateful to you as I am."

"Thank you, Sanya. Thank you, dear boy," he said, giving me another hug. He was deeply moved and his lips quivered a little.

An hour later he was sitting on the platform, in that same hall where we had once held a court to try Eugene Onegin. And we, as guests of honour, sat on his left and right among the platform party. The latter consisted of Valya, who had put on a bright green tie for the occasion, Tania Velichko, now a construction engineer, who had grown into such a tall stout woman that it was difficult to believe this was the same slim, high-principled girl I had once known, and several other pupils of Korablev's, who had been juniors in our day and whom we had looked down upon as beings who were almost sub-human. Among this generation were a number of military trainees and I was delighted to recognise some of them who had belonged to my Pioneer group.

Then, glamorous and dignified in white spats and a heavy knitted waistcoat, arrived Grisha Faber, actor of the Moscow Drama Theatre. He, for one, hadn't changed a bit! With a lordly air of condescension, as though all this had been arranged for his benefit, he implanted a sovereign kiss upon Korablev's cheek and sat down with legs crossed negligently. He was so conspicuous among the platform party that it began to look as if it were his anniversary that was being celebrated and not Korablev's at all. He passed a languid eye over the audience, then took out his comb and combed his hair. I wrote him a note:
"Grisha, you blighter, hullo!" He read it and waved a hand to me with an indulgent smile.

It was a wonderful evening and a good one, because everybody who spoke spoke the pure truth. Nobody lied—doubtless because it was not hard to speak the pure truth about Korablev. He had never demanded anything else from his pupils. I wish people would speak the same way about me in twenty-five years as they did about Korablev that evening.

I, too, made a little speech, then I went up to Korablev to kiss him, and bumped foreheads with Valya, who had come up to do the same from the other side. My speech had received thin applause, but when we bumped foreheads the applause became thunderous.



Tania Velichko spoke after me, but I did not even heard her, for Nikolai Antonich had arrived.

He came in—stout, dignified, condescending. Dressed in wide trousers, and bending slightly forward, he made his way towards the platform. I saw our poor old Serafima, the one who used to do the "duck" teaching by the complex method, running ahead of him to clear the way for him, while he strode along, unsmiling, taking no notice other.

I had not seen him since that ugly scene, when he had shouted at me, crackling his knuckles, and then spat at me. I found that he had changed a great deal since then. Behind him walked another man, who was also rather stout and walked with his body bent forward, unsmiling.

I should never have guessed who this man was if Valya had not whispered to me at that moment: "There comes Romashka too."

What-that Romashka? That sleek-haired, solid figure with the big, white, presentable face, wearing that smart grey suit? What had become of his yellow matted hair? His unnaturally round eyes—the eyes of an owl—which never closed at night?

He was all neat, sleek, toned down, and even the square heavy jaw did not look so square now. If anything it was fuller and quite presentable too. If Romashka had been able to make a new face for himself he could not have made a better job of it. On someone who met him for the first time he might even have made an agreeable impression.

Nikolai Antonich stepped up on the platform, followed by Romashka, who did everything that Nikolai Antonich did. Nikolai Antonich congratulated Korablev in a cordial, though restrained manner, and shook hands with him, but did not kiss him. Romashka, too, only shook hands with him. Nikolai Antonich passed an eye over the platform party and first greeted the Head of the City Educational Department. Romashka followed suit, the only difference being that Romashka, oddly enough, carried himself more confidently, with greater assurance.

Nikolai Antonich did not notice me. That is, he made believe I was not there. But Romashka on drawing level with me, stopped and threw his hands up in mock surprise, as much as to say: "If that isn't Grigoriev!" As if I had never kicked him in his ugly face.

"Hullo, Romashka!" I said casually.

He winced, but the next moment pretended that we were old friends who were entitled to call each other "Sanya" and "Romashka". He sat down next to me and began talking, but I checked him rather contemptuously and turned away as though listening to Tania.

But I was not listening to Tania. Everything in me was boiling and seething, and it was only by an effort of will that I was able to keep a composed face.

After the meeting the guests were invited to table. Romashka overtook me in the corridor.

"The affair went on splendidly, didn't it?"

Even his voice had become mellower.

"Yes."

"It's a pity, really, that we meet so rarely. After all we're old friends. Where do you work?"

"In civil aviation."

"So I see," he said laughing. "I meant 'where' territorially."

"In the Far North."

"Yes, of course! I'd quite forgotten. Katya told me. At Zapolarie."

Katya! Katya had told him. I grew hot, but answered in a calm voice: "Yes, Zapolarie."

After a pause, he asked guardedly: "Are you here for long?"

"I don't know yet." My reply, too, was guarded. "Depends on a lot of things."

I was pleased with myself for having answered so calmly and guardedly, and from that moment I fully recovered my composure. I became cold and courteous, cunning as a snake.

"Katya told me you were going to read a paper. At the Scientists' Club, I believe?"

"No, the Geographical Society."

Romashka eyed me with pleasure. He looked as if I'd made him happy by saying I was going to read the paper at the Geographical Society and not at the Scientists' Club. And so he was, though I didn't know it at the time.

"What's it about?"

"Come and hear it," I said coolly. "You'll find it interesting."

He winced again, this time markedly.

"Yes," he said, "I'll have to make a note not to miss it." And he began to write in his pocket diary. "What's the paper called?"

"A Forgotten Polar Expedition."

"I say, isn't that about Ivan Lvovich's expedition?"

"Captain Tatarinov's expedition," I said dryly.

But he affected not to hear my correction.

"Some new information?"

The crafty gleam in his eyes told me at once what it was all about.

"Aha, you rat," I said to myself. "Nikolai Antonich put you up to this. Wanted you to find out whether I intend to prove again that it was he, and not some von Vyshimirsky or other, who is to blame for the disaster which overtook the expedition."

"Yes, new information," I said.

Romashka looked at me closely. For a fleeting moment I saw the old Romashka, calculating what per cent of profit would work out if I let the cat out of the bag.

"By the way," he said, "Nikolai Antonich also has some interesting documents concerning that expedition. He has a lot of letters, some of them very interesting. He has shown them to me. Why not get him to show them to you?"

"I see," I said to myself. "Nikolai Antonich has asked you to bring us together to talk this matter over. He's afraid of me. But he wants me to take the first step. Nothing doing!"

"Well, no," I answered casually. "He doesn't know much about it, really. Oddly enough, I know more about his own part in the expedition than he does himself."

This was a well-directed blow, and Romashka, who was a dimwit for all that he had greatly developed, suddenly opened his mouth and stared at me dumbly.

"Katya, Katya," I thought, my heart sore on her account and my own.

"Well, well, so that's how it is," Romashka muttered.

"That's how it is."

We had approached the table and our conversation came to an end. I sat through the evening with difficulty and only did so for Korablev's sake, so as not to hurt his feelings. I felt out of sorts and would have liked to down a few drinks but I took only one glass—to the hero of the day. It was Romashka who proposed the toast. He stood up and waited for a long time in dignified patience for the noise at the table to subside. A self-satisfied expression crossed his face when he delivered himself of a well-turned phrase. He said something about "the friendship which links all the pupils of our dear teacher". He turned to me when he said this, and raised his glass to show that he was drinking to me too. I politely raised my own glass. My own expression must have been none too amiable, because Korablev looked closely first at him, then at me, and suddenly-for the moment I couldn't remember what it meant—laid his hand on the table and motioned to it with his eyes. The fingers began drumming on the table. It was our old pre-arranged signal warning me to keep cool. We both laughed at the same time, and I cheered up a bit.

CHAPTER THREE

WITHOUT A TITLE

I had an appointment that day with a member of the *Pravda* editorial staff whom I wished to tell about my discoveries. He had put me off twice, being too busy to see me, then at last he telephoned and I went to see him at the *Pravda* office.

He was a tall, attentive old chap in spectacles, who had a slight squint, so that he seemed to be looking away all the time, thinking of something else. "A specialist of a sort in aviation," he introduced himself. He seemed sincerely interested in my story-at any rate, he began to take it down on his writing pad as soon as I started speaking. He made me sketch a drawing of my method of anchoring a grounded aeroplane during a blizzard and said I ought to write an article about it for the *Civil Aviation* magazine. He phoned the magazine there and then and arranged when and to whom I was to hand in my article. He seemed to be well aware of the significance of the *St. Maria* expedition and said that now, when everybody was taking such a great interest in the Arctic, the subject was a timely and useful one.

"But there has already been an article about it," he said. "If I am not mistaken, in *Soviet Arctic."*

"In *Soviet Arctic!* "

"Yes, last year."

That was news indeed! An article about Captain Tatarinov's expedition in *Soviet Arctic* last year?

"I didn't see it," I said. "In any case, the writer cannot know what I know. I've deciphered the diaries of the navigating officer, the only survivor of the expedition to reach the mainland."

That was when I realised that the man before me was your true-born journalist. His eyes suddenly gleamed and he began taking me down quickly, even breaking his pencil in the process. Evidently it was something in the nature of a scoop. He said as much.

"Why, it's a sensation!"

Then he locked his office, and took me to see the "boss", as he declared in the corridor.

I repeated my story briefly to the "boss" and we agreed:

(a) that I would bring the diaries to the office the next day,

(b) that *Pravda* would send a reporter to my lecture, and

(c) that I would write an article about my discoveries and then "we shall see about where to publish it".

I should have raised the question, while there, of organising a search for the expedition, but decided that this was a special question which had nothing to do with the press. That was a pity, because the journalists would have been able to put me on to somebody at the Northern Sea Route Administration or even telephoned to that person for me. As it was, I spent two hours in the waiting-room for the honour of seeing one of the secretaries of the Head Office. I was shown into a private office, where I spent another half-hour. The secretary was busy. Every minute some sailor, airman, radio-operator, engineer, carpenter, agronomist or

artist went in to see him, and all the time he had to pretend he knew all there was to know about aviation, agronomy, painting and radio engineering. At last he turned to me.

"It's only of historical interest," he said when I had rushed through my story. "We have other problems to deal with, more up-to-date."

I said I knew perfectly well that it wasn't the job of the Administration to organise searches for lost expeditions. But since a high-latitudes expedition was going out that year to Severnaya Zemlya, it was quite possible to give it the minor parallel task of exploring the area of Captain Tatarinov's ill-fated expedition.

"Tatarinov, Tatarinov..." the secretary said trying to recall something. "Didn't he write something about it?"

I said he could not have written about it, as the expedition had set out from St. Petersburg about twenty years ago and the last news of it was received in 1914.

"Yes, but who was the Tatarinov who wrote about it?"

"Tatarinov was the Captain," I explained patiently. "He set sail in the autumn of 1912 aboard the schooner *St. Maria* with the aim of navigating the Northern Sea Route, that is, that very Route in whose administrative offices we now happen to be sitting. The expedition was a failure, but incidentally Captain Tatarinov made important geographical discoveries. There is full reason to believe that Severnaya Zemlya, for instance, was discovered by him, not by Vilkitsky."

"To be sure, there was an article about that expedition and I read it," the secretary said.

"Whose article?"

"Tatarinov's, if I'm not mistaken. Tatarinov's expedition, Tatarinov's article. So what are you proposing?"

I repeated my suggestion.

"Very well, write a memo about it," the secretary said, sounding as if he felt sorry for my having to write a memo which would remain lying in his desk drawer.

I left.

It could not be just a coincidence. In a book-shop in Gorky Street I thumbed through all the issues of *Soviet Arctic* for the last year. The title of the article was "A Forgotten Expedition"-the title of my own paper!—and was signed "N. Tatarinov". It had been written by Nikolai Antonich!

It was a long article written in a reminiscent vein but with a faint touch of scholarship. It began by describing the schooner *St. Maria* as she lay at her moorings near Nikolayevsky Bridge in St. Petersburg in the summer of 1912: "The white paint on her walls and ceilings was still fresh, the polished mahogany of her furniture gleamed like a mirror and carpets covered the floors of her cabins. The storerooms and hold were packed with all kinds of supplies. They had everything conceivable-nuts, sweets, chocolate, different kinds of tinned fruit, pineapples, crates of jam jars, biscuits, and many other items, including such necessities as preserved meat and stacks of flour and cereals in bags."

It was amusing to see the way Nikolai Antonich began his article by first describing the food—for me this was further incriminating evidence. Further on, however, he was more circumspect. While mentioning that the expedition had been fitted out at public expense, he modestly hinted that it was to him that the idea of "following in the

footsteps of Nordenskjold" first occurred. He spoke with bitterness about the obstacles which the reactionary press and the Ministry of Marine had put in his way. He quoted the note which the Minister of Marine wrote on the report concerning the loss of the *St. Maria:* "It is a pity that Captain Tatarinov has not returned. I should have had him prosecuted for negligence in the handling of government property."

Still more bitterly did he write about how the Archangel tradesmen had cheated his cousin by palming off on him poor, untrained dogs, which might well have been bought off any street urchin for twenty kopecks a pair, and how the whole business had gone to pieces the moment Nikolai Antonich was forced by illness to withdraw from it. He did not name the tradesmen-no fear! Only one of them was indicated by the initial V. Nikolai Antonich blamed V. for having supplied, at great profit to himself, meat which had had to be thrown overboard even before they reached Yugorsky Shar.

This part of the article was written knowledgeably. Nikolai Antonich even quoted Amundsen to the effect that the success of any expedition depends entirely on its provisioning, and brilliantly proved this point by the example of his "late cousin's" expedition. He quoted passages from his "late cousin's" letters, complaining bitterly of the speculators who took advantage of the fact that he had to cut short his stay at Archangel and put out to sea in a hurry.

Nikolai Antonich wrote practically nothing about the actual voyage, beyond mentioning that at Yugorsky Shar the *St. Maria* encountered a number of merchant vessels lying at anchor waiting for the break-up of the ice which filled the southern part of the Kara Sea. According to one of the skippers the *St. Maria* was seen heading into the Kara Sea at dawn on September 17th and was lost to view over the horizon behind an uninterrupted line of ice. "The task which I. L. Tatarinov set himself," Nikolai Antonich wrote, "was not fulfilled." "In passing, however, he made a remarkable discovery—that of Severnaya Zemlya, which he named 'Maria Land'."

I bought this issue of *Soviet Arctic,* all the more as it contained references to other articles by the same writer on the same subject, and returned to my hotel.

I returned in anything but a good humour. It seemed to me that since this lie had been printed, and so long ago into the bargain—over a year ago—then there was nothing more to be said. It was too late to challenge it, and nobody would listen to me if I did. He had forestalled me. It was a lie, but a lie mixed with truth. He had been the first to point out the significance of the expedition of the *St. Maria.* He had been the first to show that Severnaya Zemlya had been discovered by Captain Tatarinov six months before it was first sighted by Vilkitsky. He had taken this, of course, from the Captain's letter, which I had given to Katya. He had beaten me to it on all points.

I paced my room whistling.

Truth to tell, what I wanted most at that moment was to go to the railway station and book a ticket to Krasnoyarsk and from there fly to Zapolarie. But instead of going to the station I sat down to write my memorandum. I wrote it all day, and when you work all day all the cheerless thoughts that keep coming into your head have to go away again because the place is occupied.

CHAPTER FOUR

NEWS GALORE

I came in to find Korablev squatting in front of the stove, which he was making up. It was such a familiar scene-Korablev there at the stove in his old, shaggy jacket-that I even felt for a moment that all those years had never been, that I was still a schoolboy, and was going to get a wigging, as I did that time when I went to Ensk to see Katya. But then he turned round. "How old he has gone," I thought, and in a flash everything fell back into place.

"There you are at last!" Korablev said gruffly. "Why didn't you come and stay with me?"

"Thanks, Ivan Pavlovich."

"You wrote you'd stay with me, didn't you?"

"I'd be inconveniencing you."

He looked at me, closing one eye, as if the better to take me all in. It was the appraising look of a master examining his handiwork. The sight must have pleased him, because he stroked his moustache and told me to sit down.

"I didn't get a proper look at you yesterday," he said. "I was too busy."

He laid the table, got a bottle out of the cupboard, cut some bread, then got out some cold veal and cut it up. He was still living alone, but the damp old flat looked cosier and did not seem to be so damp. The only thing I didn't like was that while I was talking he was helping himself to the bottle without taking a bite. It worried me.

I said I was going to tell him only the bare essentials, but it is not easy to pick these out when after so many years you meet a person who is near and dear to you. Korablev questioned me about the North, about my work as an airman, and was displeased at the brief answers I gave him.

"Do you remember, Sanya, what you said to me when you were leaving Moscow? You said: 'It remains for me now to prove that I am right even if I have to die in the attempt.' Well, have you proved it?"

It was an unexpected question and I digested it. I remembered our talk all right. I remembered how Korablev had shouted: "What have you done, Sanya! My God, what have you done!" And how he had wept, saying that it was all my fault, because I had insisted that the Captain's letter referred to Nikolai Antonich when in fact it referred to some von Vyshimirsky or other.

I couldn't quite see why Korablev should have mentioned that talk of ours. But he must have had some reason for wanting me to remember it. He looked at me gravely and seemed secretly pleased about something.

"I don't know who cares whether I prove something or not," I said gloomily. "Who wants it?"

"That's just where you're mistaken, Sanya," Korablev said. "You want it, and I want it, and so does one other person. Especially since you have proved to be right."

I stared at him. Five years have passed since that talk of ours. I now knew more than anybody else in the world about Captain Tatarinov's expedition. I had found the navigator's diaries and read them—the

hardest job I had ever undertaken. I had had the good luck of meeting that old Nenets, the last man who, with his own eyes, had seen a sledge belonging to the expedition, and on this sledge, a dead man who might have been the Captain himself. Yet I had not found a single piece of evidence to show that I was right.

And now, when I had returned to Moscow and called on my old teacher—who, I would have supposed, had long since forgotten about this affair—now he tells me: "You have proved to be right!"

"Ivan Pavlovich," I began rather shakily, "you really shouldn't say such things unless you have—"

I was going to say "irrefutable evidence", but he checked me. The doorbell rang. Korablev bit his lip and looked round anxiously.

"I say, Sanya... I have to see a certain person. Do you mind sitting here a bit?"

As he said this he led me into the next room, which was like a large bookcase cluttered up with books. Instead of a door it had a green curtain which was full of holes.

"And keep your ears open. It'll be worth your while."

I forgot to mention that Korablev that evening had struck me as behaving rather oddly. Several times he had started to whistle softly. He had paced the room with his hands clasped on his head and ended by chewing the pear stem with which he had been picking his teeth. After piloting me into the "bookcase" he hastily removed the vodka from the table, then took something out of his desk, chewed on it, then took several deep breaths with his mouth wide open, and went out to open the door.

Who do you think was with him when he came back into the room? Nina Kapitonovna! Yes, it was Nina Kapitonovna, bent, thinner than before, with the shadows of age round her eyes, and wearing the same old velvet coat.

She was saying something, but I was not listening. I was watching Korablev as he attended solicitously to his visitor's comfort. He was about to pour her out some tea, but she checked him.

"I don't want any. I've just had some. Well, how are you?"

"So-so, Nina Kapitonovna," Korablev said. "My back aches."

"How come? Making old bones! Fancy saying such a thing! Rub Born Bengue into your back if it aches. It helps."

"Born Bengue-what is that?"

"An ointment. Do you drink?"

"I don't, Nina Kapitonovna, honestly," Korablev said. "I've given ft up. Just once in a while, maybe, a small glass before dinner. Even the doctors advise it."

"No, you do drink. Now, when I was young I lived on a farm down south. My father was a Cossack, you know. He'd come in, hardly able to stand on his two legs, and say: 'That's nothing, if a man wants to kill himself he drinks a glass before dinner every day.' "

Korablev laughed. Nina Kapitonovna looked at him and began to laugh too. Then she told him a story about some winebibber of a countess who "used to down a glass of vodka first thing in the morning, as soon as she woke up. Then she'd start walking around. All yellow, puffy and blowsy. She'd walk around a bit, then have another one. In the morning she was still normal, but by dinnertime she was tight as a drum. In the evening she'd have a houseful o' visitors. Dressed

beautifully, she'd sit down at the piano and sing. Talk about kind-hearted! Everyone went to her. With the most trifling things. A fine person, she was. But a drunkard!"

Apparently, this example did not exactly please Korablev, who tried to change the subject. He asked how Katya was getting on.

Nina Kapitonovna made a little deprecating gesture with her hand. "We quarrel," she said with a sigh. "She's so touchy. And awfully proud! If she fails in one thing, she goes after another. That's why she's so nervous, all on edge."

"Nervous**?"**

"Yes. And proud. And she won't talk," said Nina Kapitonovna. "I've had an eyeful of those who won't talk, you know. I don't like the look of it at all. I mean the way she keeps to herself. What's the sense? Why not unburden your mind? But she won't." "Why don't you ask her, Nina Kapitonovna?" "She won't say. I'm like that myself. I'll never say." "I met her once, she seemed all right to me," said Korablev. "She was going to the theatre-true, all by herself, and I thought it strange. But she was quite cheerful, she said, by the way, that she'd been offered a room in a Geological Institute house."

"They did offer her a room. But she hasn't moved in." "Why not?" "She feels sorry for him." "Sorry?" Korablev queried.

"Yes, sorry. For the sake of her mother's memory, and for his own sake, too. And when she's not there he's not himself. Soon as he comes in he asks: 'Where's Katya? Has she phoned?'" I guessed at once that "he" was Nikolai Antonich. "So she hasn't left. AU the time waiting for someone." Nina Kapitonovna moved her chair up closer to Korablev. "I read a letter once," she whispered slyly, looking round as if Katya might see her. "They must have become friends at Ensk when Katya was there for her holidays. His sister. And she writes: 'He keeps asking me in every letter, where is Katya, what's the matter with her, I'd give everything to see her. He can't live without you and I can't understand what this quarrel of yours is about.' "

"Excuse me, Nina Kapitonovna, I didn't get you. Whose sister?" "Whose? Why, that chap. That friend of yours." Korablev darted a look in my direction, and I met his eyes through a hole in the curtain. My sister? Sanya?

"Well, I suppose that's how it really is," said Korablev. "Very likely he can't live without her. I shouldn't be surprised."

" 'He keeps asking'," Nina Kapitonovna repeated pointedly, "And 'he can't live without you'. There! And she can't live without him."

Korablev again glanced in my direction. I fancied a smile lurking in his moustache. "Yet she thinks of marrying another."

"Nothing of the kind. He isn't of her choice. She has no use for that Romashov fellow. No more have I. That holy Joe." "Holy Joe?"

"That's what he is. Full o' taradiddle too. Whatever you tell him he's sure to add something to it right away. Thievish too." "Surely not, Nina Kapitonovna!"

"Thievish, I say. He took forty rubles from me, said it was to buy a present, and never gave it back. I didn't remind him, of course. And such a busybody, so nosy. My God! If it wasn't for my age—" She waved her hand with a rueful gesture.

You can imagine what my feelings were as I listened to this conversation! I looked at the old lady through the hole in the curtain, and that hole was like a lens in which everything that had happened

between Katya and me was focussed, becoming clearer and clearer every minute. Everything came nearer and fell into place, and there was such a lot of it and all so good that my heart began to quiver, and I realised that I was terribly excited. The only thing I couldn't understand was this: I had never "kept asking" my sister and had never written to her that "I could not live without Katya".

"Sanya made that up, that's what it is," I said to myself. "She was fibbing. Yet it was all true."

Nina Kapitonovna was still speaking, but I was no longer listening. I had forgotten myself to such an extent that I began to walk up and down my "bookcase" and only recollected myself when I heard Korablev's warning cough.

And there I sat in the "bookcase" until Nina Kapitonovna went away. I don't know why she had come-maybe it was just to unburden her heart, Korablev kissed her hand at parting and she kissed him on the brow, the way they had always done when taking leave of each other.

I was lost in thought and did not hear him come back into the room until suddenly I saw his nose and moustache above me between the curtains.

"Still breathing?"

"Still breathing, Ivan Pavlovich."

"What have you to say?"

"That I'm a hopeless, drivelling idiot," I answered, clutching my head. "The way I spoke to her! My God! I did not understand a thing. Not a thing! And she was waiting for me to say something. What must her feelings have been, Ivan Pavlovich! What does she think of me!"

"Never mind, she'll change her mind."

"Never! Do you know what I told her? " I said to her: 'I'll keep you informed.'

Korablev laughed.

"Ivan Pavlovich!"

"But didn't you write that you couldn't live without her?"

"I didn't!" I cried despairingly. "Sanya made that all up. But it's true, Ivan Pavlovich! It's the absolute truth. I can't live without her, and the quarrel between us is really over nothing, because I thought she didn't love me any more. But what's to be done now? What's to be done?"

"Look here, Sanya, I have a business appointment at nine o'clock. At a theatre. So if you-"

"All right. I'm going. May I call on Katya now?"

"She'll show you the door, and she'll be quite right."

"I don't care if she does, Ivan Pavlovich!" I said, and suddenly embraced him. "Damn и all, I just don't know what to do now. What do you say?"

"I have to change just now," Korablev said, going into the "bookcase". "As for you, I suggest you pull yourself together."

I saw him take off his jacket, turn up the collar of his soft shirt and start tying his tie.

"Ivan Pavlovich!" I suddenly yelled. "Wait a minute. I quite forgot! You said I was right when we argued about whom the Captain's letter referred to."

"I did."

"Ivan Pavlovich!"

Korablev came out of the "bookcase" brushed and combed, in a new grey suit, looking young and presentable.

"Now, we're going to the theatre," he said gravely, "and you'll learn everything. Your job will be to sit and say nothing. Sit and listen. Is that clear?"

"I'm all in the dark. But let's go."

CHAPTER FIVE

AT THE THEATRE

The Moscow Drama Theatre! To judge from Grisha Faber's description, it was a big, real playhouse in which all the actors wore smart white spats like he did and spoke just as loudly and well. Something like the Moscow Art Theatre. But it turned out to be a little place in Sretenka up some side street.

The play that evening, as the illuminated showcase at the entrance announced, was *Wolf's Trail,* and we immediately found Grisha's name in the cast. He was playing the doctor. His name stood last in the list.

Grisha met us in the foyer, looking as resplendent as ever, and invited us at once to his dressing-room.

"I'll call him in as soon as the second act starts," he said mysteriously to Korablev.

I glanced questioningly at Korablev, but he was busy fitting a cigarette into his long holder and pretended not to have noticed my look.

There were three other actors in Grisha's dressing-room, who looked as if they belonged there. But when Grisha proffered us chairs there they tactfully went out, and he apologised for the place. "My private dressing-room is undergoing repairs," he said. We began talking about our school theatre, recalled the tragedy *The Hour Has Struck,* in which Grisha had played the part of a Jewish foster-child, and I said I thought him simply wonderful in that role. Grisha laughed, and suddenly the air of self-importance fell away from him.

"I don't understand what happened, Sanya. You used to draw well, I remember," he said. "What made you suddenly take to the sky? Hell, come and join our theatre. We'll make a scenic artist out 'of you. Not bad, eh?"

I said I had no objection. Then Grisha excused himself again—he had to go on very shortly and the make-up man was waiting for him— and went out. We were left alone.

"For God's sake, Ivan Pavlovich, what is it all about? What have you brought me here for? Who is 'he'? Who is it you want me to meet?"

"You won't do anything silly, will you?"

"Ivan Pavlovich!"

"You've done one silly thing already," Korablev said. "Two, as a matter of fact. First, you didn't come and stay with me. Second, you told Katya: 'I'll keep you informed.' "

"But Ivan Pavlovich, how was I to know? You simply wrote to me that I should come to you. I never suspected it was so important. Now tell

me, who are we waiting for here? Who's this person, and why do you want me to meet him?"

"All right," said Korablev. "Only don't forget—you've got to sit still and say nothing. The man is von Vyshimirsky."

We were sitting, you will remember, in Grisha's dressing-room in the Moscow Drama Theatre. But at that moment it seemed to me that all this was taking place, not in the dressing-room, but on the stage, because Korablev had hardly finished the sentence than into the room, ducking not to knock his head on the low lintel of the doorway, stepped von Vyshimirsky himself.

I guessed at once that it was he, though until that moment it had never occurred to me that the man ever existed. I had always thought that Nikolai Antonich had invented him in order to heap on him all my accusations. He had been no more than a name, and now here he was, suddenly materialising as a tall, weedy old man with a bent back and yellow-grey moustache. Nowadays, of course, he was simply Vyshimirsky, with no "von" handle to his name. He wore a uniform jacket with brass buttons—that of a cloakroom attendant.

Korablev said "good evening" to him. He responded easily, even patronisingly, with an extended hand.

"So this is who is waiting for me—Comrade Korablev," he said. "And not alone, but with his son. He is your son?" he added quickly, glancing swiftly from me to Korablev and back again.

"No he's not my son, he's a former pupil of mine. But he's an airman now and he wants to meet you."

"An airman and wants to meet me?" Vyshimirsky said with an unpleasant smile. "Why should an airman be interested in my poor person?"

"Your poor person interests him," said Korablev, "because he happens to be writing an account of Captain Tatarinov's expedition. And you, as we know, took a very active part in that expedition."

This remark did not exactly please Vyshimirsky, I could see. He darted another quick look at me, and something like suspicion—or was it fear?-flashed in his old rheumy eyes.

The next moment he assumed a dignified air and began to talk nineteen to the dozen. Almost every other word was "Comrade Korablev", and he boasted blatantly. He said that it had been a great, historic expedition, and that he had done a lot "to make it a shining success". While saying this, he kept fidgeting about all the time, standing up, making various motions with his hands, seizing his left whisker and nervously tugging it downward, and so on.

"But that was a very long time ago," he wound up in a surprised sort of way.

"Not so very long," Korablev interposed. "Just before the revolution."

"Yes, just before the revolution. In those days I wasn't working in an artel of disabled men. The work I'm doing now is only temporary, though, because I have important services to my credit. We put in some good work those days. Yes, very good work."

I was about to ask him what, exactly, that work was, but Korablev silenced me with a steady, blank gaze.

"You once told me something about this expedition," Korablev went on. "I remember you saying you have certain papers and letters. Would you please repeat your story to this young man, whom you can simply

call Sanya. Name the day and hour he can come and see you and leave your address with him."

"Certainly! I shall be delighted. You can come and see me, though I must apologise beforehand for my lodgings. I used to have an eleven-room apartment, and I don't conceal the fact, on the contrary, I write it down whenever I have to fill up a questionnaire, because I have done good service for the people. On the strength of this I have applied for a special pension, and I shall get it, because I have rendered great services. This expedition is a mere drop in the ocean! I have built a bridge across the Volga."

And off he went again! With that tuft of grey hair sticking up on his head he resembled a harassed old bird.

Then the lamp in Grisha's dressing-room went out for a second-signalling the end of the act—and this spectre of a past age vanished as suddenly as it had appeared.

The whole conversation had lasted some five minutes, but it seemed to me that it had gone on for a very long time, as in a dream. Korablev looked at me and laughed; my face must have been a study.

"Ivan Pavlovich!"

"Yes, my boy?"

"Was that him?"

"It was."

"Can that be?"

"It can."

"The very same man?"

"The very same."

"What did he tell you? Does he know Nikolai Antonich? Does he go there?"

"Oh, no," Korablev said. "That he doesn't."

"Why not?"

"Because he hates Nikolai Antonich."

"Why?"

"For various reasons."

"What did he tell you? That power of attorney made out to von Vyshimirsky—where did it come from? You remember telling me about it?"

"Ah! That's just it!" Korablev said. "The power of attorney! He nearly burst a blood vessel when I asked him about it."

"Ivan Pavlovich, tell me all about it, please, I beg you! D'you think it was nice, your telling me at the last moment that Vyshimirsky was coming? I was so flabbergasted he must have thought me an idiot."

"On the contrary, he took a fancy to you," Korablev answered gravely. "He has a grown-up daughter and he looks at every young man from one angle—whether he's eligible or not. You are definitely eligible—young, good-looking and an airman to boot."

"Ivan Pavlovich," I said reproachfully, "I don't know what's come over you, really. You've changed a lot, yes, you have. You know how important this is for me, yet you make fun of me."

"Oh, all right, Sanya, don't be angry. I'll tell you everything," said Korablev. "But first let's get out of here before Grisha catches us and makes us sit through a play at the Moscow Drama Theatre."

"How on earth did you find this Vyshimirsky fellow?" I asked.

"Very simple-his son goes to our school," Korablev replied.

CHAPTER SIX

STILL MORE COMES TO LIGHT

I never understood anything about bills of exchange-the word itself had gone out of use when I started going to school. What's an "acknowledgment of loan"? What's an "endorsement"? What's a "policy"? Not in the political sense—everyone knows that. What's a "discount"?

When these and other banking terms occurred in books that I read it always reminded me of the "Chambers" at Ensk-the iron seats in the dimly-lit high corridor, and the unseen official behind the barrier to whom Mother had bowed so humbly. It was a reminder of the old, long-forgotten life, which gradually emerged from the dim past as Vyshimirsky unfolded to me the story of his misfortunes.

We were sitting in a small room with a basement window through which I could see a broom and a pair of legs-evidently belonging to the yardman. Everything in this room was old-the rickety chairs held together with strings, the dining table on which I leaned my elbow only to remove it at once because the panel bade fair to drop off. There was dirty upholstery material everywhere—on the window in lieu of curtains, on the shabby covering of the sofa, and even the clothes hanging on the wall were covered with the same stuff. The only new things in the room were some slats, reels and coils of wire with which Vyshimirsky's son was occupied over a table in a corner of the room. The boy was about twelve, with a round, sunburnt face. He, too, was quite new, and as far removed from the world which his father's story conjured up to me as heaven is from earth.

It was a long, disjointed tale, interspersed with references to bills of exchange and discounts, and full of digressions and a good deal of nonsense. Absolutely everything the old man had ever done in his lifetime he put down to his credit as a service rendered "to the people". He made much of his work as secretary to the Metropolitan Isidore, declaring that he had an intimate knowledge of the life of the clergy and had even made a special study of it in the hope that this might be "of benefit to the people". He was prepared to blow the lid off this Metropolitan at any moment.

Another job he laid to his credit was with some admiral by the name of Heckert. This admiral had "an insane son" and Vyshimirsky took him around restaurants so that nobody should guess that he was insane, a fact which "they tried to conceal".

Then he started talking about Nikolai Antonich, and I pricked up my ears. I had been convinced that Nikolai Antonich had always been a teacher. He was a typical schoolmaster. Even at home he was always lecturing, citing examples.

"Nothing of the sort," Vyshimirsky said with a vicious grimace. "He took that up when he was at the end of his tether. He was in business. He played the stock-market, he was a stock-jobber. A wealthy man who played the market and engaged in business."

This was the first piece of news. It was followed by a second. I asked what connection there was between Captain Tatarinov's expedition and stock-jobbing. What had made Nikolai Antonich take a hand in it? Was it because it was profitable?

"He would have taken a still more willing hand in it if the expedition had been to the next world," said Vyshimirsky. "He counted on that, counted very strongly." "I don't understand." "He was in love with the Captain's wife. There was quite a lot of talk about that at the time. Quite a lot. But the Captain did not suspect anything. He was a fine man, the Captain, but simple-minded. A regular sea-dog!" '

I was dumbfounded.

"Nikolai Antonich in love with Maria Vasilievna? Even in those days?"

"Yes, yes," Vyshimirsky repeated impatiently. "There were personal reasons. Get me-personal? Personal, person, personality. He would have given his whole fortune to have that Captain packed off to the next world. And pack him off he did."

But love or not love, business was business. Nikolai Antonich did not give up his fortune, on the contrary he doubled it. He took delivery of rotten clothing for the expedition and pocketed a bribe from the supplier. He took delivery of spoilt chocolate that smelt of kerosene, also in return for a bribe.

"Sabotage, deliberate sabotage," said Vyshimirsky. "It was planned as such!"

Evidently Vyshimirsky had not always held this negative view of the plan, considering his part in it and the fact that Nikolai Antonich had sent him to Archangel to meet the expedition and complete its fitting out.

This was where the power of attorney which Nikolai Antonich had shown to Korablev first comes into the picture. Together with this document Vyshimirsky had received money in cash and bills of exchange.

Sniffing angrily, the old man fished several bills out of the chest of drawers. A bill of exchange, broadly speaking, was a receipt for money stipulating that it was to be paid back at a stated time. Only this receipt was made out on thick state paper, which had watermarks and an expensive, impressive look. Vyshimirsky explained to me that these bills circulated in place of money. But they were not exactly money, because the "drawer" might suddenly declare that he had no money to meet them.

This left openings for all kinds of sharp practices, and Vyshimirsky accused Nikolai Antonich of one such swindle.

He accused him of having sent him, along with the power of attorney, bills of exchange which were no good, because the drawers were insolvent and unable to pay, and Nikolai Antonich had known this beforehand. Vyshimirsky did not know this and took the bills for money, all the more as the drawers were merchants and other people who were considered respectable in those days. He did not know this until the schooner had set sail, leaving debts to the amount of forty-eight thousand. Nobody, of course, would negotiate these dead bills.

And so Vyshimirsky had had to pay these debts out of his own pocket. Afterwards he had had to pay them over again, because Nikolai Antonich brought an action against him and the court ordered Vyshimirsky to repay all the monies which had been remitted to him in Archangel.

Of course, I have given only the gist of this story. The old man spent two hours telling it, and kept getting up and sitting down during its narration.

"I fought the case all the way to the Senate," he wound up grimly. "But I lost it."

That was the end of him, because his property came under the hammer. His house-he had a house-was sold too, and he moved into smaller rooms. His wife died of grief, leaving him with young children on his hands. Then, when the Revolution came, he found himself in a single room, the one he was now obliged to live in. Or course, this was "only temporary", because "the government would soon appreciate his services to the people at their true worth". Meanwhile, he was obliged to live there, and he had a grown-up daughter who knew two languages and couldn't get married owing to the cramped space they lived in—there was no room in it for the husband. But he would move out as soon as he got his special pension.

"I'll move anywhere, to a Disabled Persons' Home if need be," he said with a gesture of bitter resignation.

Obviously, this grown-up daughter of his was very keen of getting married and wanted him to move out.

"Nikolai Ivanovich," I said to him, "may I ask you one question? You say that he sent this power of attorney to you in Archangel. How did he get it back again?"

Vyshimirsky stood up. His nostrils dilated and the tuft of grey hair on *his* head quivered with anger.

"I threw the paper in his face," he said. "He ran out to get me some water, but I didn't stay to drink it. I had a fainting fit in the street. Oh, what's the use of talking!"

I heard him out with a painful feeling. There was something sordid about this story, as sordid as everything else around me in that room, so that all the time I felt like washing my hands. It had seemed to me that our talk would yield further evidence proving me in the right, evidence as new and surprising as the sudden appearance of this man himself had been. And so it did. Nevertheless, it was annoying to think that this new evidence was contaminated with dirt.

Then he started off again about his pension, saying that they were bound to give him a special pension, seeing that he had an employment record of over forty-five years. One young man had already called on him and collected his papers. He, too, was interested in Nikolai Antonich, by the way, but he did not call again.

"He promised to do something for me," said Vyshimirsky, "but he never came again."

"Interested in Nikolai Antonich?"

"Yes. He was interested, to be sure he was."

"Who was it?"

Vyshimirsky spread his hands.

"He called several times," he said. "I have a grown-up daughter, you know, and they sat together talking and drinking tea. Getting acquainted, you know."

The shadow of a smile crossed his face-evidently this acquaintance had raised certain hopes.

"Well, well," I said. "And he took some papers away, you say?"

"Yes. To help get my pension, a special pension."

"And he inquired about Nikolai Antonich?"

"Yes, he did. He even asked whether I knew anybody else. Whether anybody else knew what this ugly customer had been up to. I put him on to one man."

"That's interesting. Who is that young man?"

"A respectable-looking man, too," said Vyshimirsky. "He promised to do something. He said he had to have all those papers to get me a pension. A special pension."

I asked what his name was, but the old man could not remember.

"Something with a 'sha' in it," he said.

Then his grown-up daughter came in. I could see now why there was such a hurry to get her married. It was going to be a problem, not because there was "no room for a husband" but because to that lady's nose. It was a terrific nose, and it kept sniffing and snuffling with an alarmingly predatory air.

I greeted her politely, and she ran out, reappearing some minutes later looking quite a different person. She was wearing a normal dress now in place of that Arab burnous thing she had had on when she came in.

We fell into conversation, talking first about Korablev, who was the only acquaintance we had in common, then about his pupil, who was still fiddling about in his comer with his reels and coils and paying no attention to us whatever.

"Anyuta, what was the name of that young man?" her father asked timidly.

"What young man?"

"The one who promised to get me my pension."

Anyuta's nose twitched and her lips quivered, and a variety of expressions crossed her face. The strongest was indignation.

"I don’t remember-Romashov, I think," she answered carelessly.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"WE HAVE A VISITOR!"

Romashka! Romashka had been to see them! He had promised the old man assistance in getting him a special pension, he had paid court to Anyuta with the nose! In the end he had disappeared, taking some papers with him, and the old man could not even remember what kind

of papers they were. At first I thought this was some other Romashov, some other man by the same name. But no, it was the same one. I described him in detail, and Anyuta said venomously:
"That's him!"

He had paid court to her, that was clear. Afterwards he had stopped paying court, otherwise she would not be calling him the names she did. He had got out of the old man everything he knew about Nikolai Antonich. He was collecting information. What for? Why had he taken from Vyshimirsky those papers, which only went to prove one thing - that before the revolution Nikolai Antonich had been no teacher, but just a mean stock-jobber?

I came away from Vyshimirsky with a reeling head. There could be only two solutions here—either that his purpose was to destroy all traces of this past, or to get some sort of hold over Nikolai Antonich.

A hold over him? But why? Wasn't he his pupil, his most devoted and loyal pupil? He had always been that, even at school, when he eavesdropped on the boys to hear what they were saying about Nikolai Antonich and then reported it to him. No, he was acting on instructions! Nikolai Antonich had asked him to find out what Vyshimirsky knew about him. It was a "plant". He had sent Romashov to take away the papers which might prove damaging to him.

I went into a cafe and had some ice-cream. Then I had a drink of something-some mineral water. I felt very hot and kept thinking and thinking. After all, many years had passed since Romashka and I had parted after finishing school. At that time he had been a nasty piece of work, a mean, cold soul. But he was sincerely devoted to Nikolai Antonich—at least, so we thought. Now I wasn't so sure. He may have changed. Perhaps, without Nikolai Antonich knowing it, out of pure devotion to him, he had decided to destroy papers which might cast a reflection on the good name of his teacher, his friend?

No, he would never do anything merely out of devotion to that man. There was some other motive behind this, I was sure. But I couldn't make out what that motive was. I could only go by the old set of relations which had existed between Nikolai Antonich and Romashka, as I knew very little about their present relations.

It might have been some very simple motive, something to do with promotion. Nikolai Antonich, it should be remembered, was a professor, and Romashka was his assistant. It might even be money-even as a schoolboy his ears used to burn at the mere mention of money. Something to do with his salary perhaps.

I phoned Valya. I wanted to consult him, seeing that he had been visiting the Tatarinovs in recent years, but he was not at home. He never was when he was most needed!
"No, it's not salary or a career," I went on thinking. "He'd get these by other, simpler means. You only have to look at him." It was time to go home, but evening was only just drawing in, a lovely Moscow evening so unlike my evenings at Zapolarie that I felt a desire to walk back to my hotel, though it was a good distance away.

And so I sauntered off, first in the direction of Gorky Street, then down Vorotnikovsky Street. Familiar places! I had passed my hotel and continued down Vorotnikovsky, then turned off into Sadovo-Triumfalnaya, past our school. And from there it was a stone's throw to 2nd Tverskaya-Yamskaya, where a few minutes later found me standing

in front of a familiar house. I looked through the gate and saw a familiar tidy little courtyard and a familiar brickbuilt woodshed where I used to chop wood for the old lady. And there was the staircase down which I had tumbled head over heels, and there the door with the brass nameplate on which was inscribed in fanciful lettering: "N. A. Tatarinov".

"Katya, I've come to see you. You won't drive me away, will you?"

Afterwards Katya said that she realised at once the moment she saw me that I was "quite different" from what I had been the other day outside the Bolshoi Theatre. One thing she couldn't make out, though- why, coming to see her so suddenly and looking "quite different", I never took my eyes off Nikolai Antonich and Romashka the whole evening.

That was an exaggeration, of course, but I did glance at them now and again. My brain that evening was working at full exam-time pressure and I guessed and grasped things at a bare hint.

I forgot to mention that before leaving the cafe I had bought some flowers. I had walked to the Tatarinovs' house carrying a bunch of flowers and felt rather awkward. Ever since the days Pyotr and I had stolen gillyflowers from the gardening beds at Ensk and sold them for five kopecks a bunch to people coming out of the theatre, I had never walked through the streets carrying flowers. Now that I had come, I should have given the flowers to Katya. Instead, I put them down on the hall table beside my cap.

I just have shown some agitation, though, because when I spoke I couldn't keep the ring out of my voice. Katya looked at me quickly straight in the face.

We were about to go into her room, but at that moment Nina Kapitonovna came out of the dining-room. I bowed. She looked at me blankly and nodded stiffly.

"Grandma, this is Sanya. Don't you recognise him?"

"Sanya? Bless my heart! Is it really?"

She threw a startled look over the shoulder, and through the open door of the dining-room I saw Nikolai Antonich sitting in an armchair with a newspaper in his hands. He was at home!

"How do you do, Nina Kapitonovna!" I said warmly. "Do you still remember me? I bet you have forgotten me."

"No I haven't. Forgotten! Nothing of the sort," the old lady answered.

We were still embracing when Nikolai Antonich appeared in the doorway.

It was a moment of renewed mutual appraisal. He could have ignored me, as he had done at Korablev's anniversary party. He could have made it plain that we were strangers. Finally, he could have shown me the door if he had dared. But he did none of these things.

"Ah, our young eagle?" he said affably. "So you've come flying in at last? And high time too."

And he held his hand out to me unhesitatingly.

"How do you do, Nikolai Antonich."

Katya looked at us in surprise, and the old lady blinked dazedly, but I was tickled - I now felt up to any talk with Nikolai Antonich.

"Well,'well... That's fine," Nikolai Antonich said, regarding me gravely. "It seems only yesterday that we had a boy, and now he's an

Arctic pilot, if you please. And what a profession to have chosen too! Good for you!"

"Quite an ordinary profession, Nikolai Antonich," I said "Just like any other."

"Any other? What about self-control? And courage in dangerous situations? And discipline? Not only service discipline, but moral discipline, too-self-discipline, so to speak."

It made me feel sick, as of old, to hear these bombastic, well-turned phrases of his, but I listened to him with courteous attention. He looked much older than he had at the anniversary party and his face was careworn. As we passed into the dining-room he put an arm round Katya's shoulders, and she drew away with a barely perceptible movement.

In the dining-room sat one of the Bubenchikov aunts, which one exactly I couldn't make out. My last encounter with the two of them had been a rather stormy one. Anyway, this aunt now greeted me quite nicely.

"Well, we're waiting," said Nikolai Antonich, when Nina Kapitonovna, fussing timidly around me, had poured me out some tea and moved up to me everything that lay on the table. "We're waiting to hear some tales of the Arctic. Flying blind, permafrost, drifting icefields snowy wastes!"

"Nothing to write home about, Nikolai Antonich," I answered cheerily. "Just icefields as icefields go."

Nikolai Antonich laughed.

"I once met an old friend who is now working in our trade delegation in Rome," he said. "I asked him: 'Well, what's Rome like?' And he answered: 'Nothing much. Just Rome.' "

His tone was condescending. Katya was listening to us with down--A cast eyes. To keep the ball rolling I started talking about the Nentsi, about the Arctic scenery, and even my flight to Vanokan with the doctor. Nina Kapitonovna wanted to know whether I flew very high, and this reminded me of Aunt Dasha's letter which I had received when still at school at Balashov: "Since it's not your lot to walk on the ground like other people, then I beg you, Sanya dear, to fly low."

I told them how Misha Golomb had got hold of that letter and how, ever since then, whenever I put on my flying-helmet, the boys at the airfield used to shout from all sides: "Sanya, don't fly high!"

Misha started a comic journal at the school entitled *Fly Low*. It ran a special section called: "Flying Techniques in Pictures" with verses like this:

It's good to glide when you get height,

Don't try daisy-clipping, though,

Don't risk your life on any flight,

Take Auntie's advice and fly low.

I must have made it a good story, because everyone laughed, loudest of all Nikolai Antonich. He held his sides with laughter. His face turned pale - it always did when he laughed.

Katya hardly sat at the table. She kept getting up and disappearing for long periods in the kitchen, and I had an idea that she went out in order

to be alone and think things out. She had that sort of look when she came back into the room. On one such occasion she went up to the sideboard with a biscuit barrel and evidently forgot what she had gone there for. I looked her straight in the eye and she answered with an anxious puzzled look.

Nikolai Antonich must have noticed our exchange of glances. His face clouded and he began to speak still more slowly and smoothly.

Then Romashka arrived. Nina Kapitonovna answered the doorbell and I heard her say to him in the hall in a tone of timid malice:

"We have a visitor!"

He lingered in the hall for quite a time, preening himself, no doubt. When he came in he did not show the slightest surprise at seeing me.

"Ah, so that's who your visitor is," he said with a sour smile. "Very glad. Very glad to see you, very glad." His face belied his words. If anybody was glad it was me. From the moment he came in I watched his every movement. I did not take my eyes off him. What kind of man was he? How had he turned out? What was his attitude to Nikolai Antonich, to Katya? He went up to her and started chatting, and every movement, every word of his was a sort of riddle which I had to guess there and then, while my eyes kept drilling his face and I kept thinking about him.

Now that I saw them together, him and Katya, I could have laughed—so insignificant did he look beside her, so ugly and meanly. He sounded very sure of himself when he talked to her, "too sure" I made a mental note. He passed some humorous remark to Nina Kapitonovna, but nobody smiled. "Not even Nikolai Antonich," I made another mental note.

The two started talking shop, something to do with a student's thesis, which Nikolai Antonich considered poor, and Romashka considered good.

This was done, of course, to stress the fact that my presence meant nothing to them. I preferred it that way, if anything, because I was now able to sit and watch them, listening and thinking.

"No," I said to myself, "this is not the old Romashka, who was even proud of being at the complete beck and call of Nikolai Antonich. He talks to him in a slighting tone, almost offensive, and Nikolai Antonich answers wearily, wincing. Theirs is a difficult relationship, and Nikolai Antonich finds it irksome. I was right. Romashka had not been acting on his behalf. He had not taken those papers from Vyshimirsky in order to destroy them. He had done it so that he could sell them to Nikolai Antonich—that was more like him. And must have demanded a pretty stiff price too. That is, if he had sold them and was not still haggling."

Katya asked me something and I answered her. Romashka, who was listening to Nikolai Antonich, glanced at us uneasily, and suddenly an idea passed slowly through my mind and seemed to step a little to one side of the others as if waiting for me to come up closer. It was a very weird idea, but quite a valid one for anybody who had known Romashov since childhood. At the moment, however, I could not dwell on it because the thought was chilling and would not bear thinking of. I merely glanced at it, as it were, from the side.

Then Nikolai Antonich went into his study with Romashka and we were left with the old ladies, one of whom was deaf while the other pretended to be deaf.

"Katya," I said quietly, "Korablev asked you to call on him tomorrow at seven. Will you come?"

She nodded.

"Was it all right, my coming here? I wanted to see you ever so badly."

She nodded again.

"And please forget that evening when we last met. It was all wrong. Consider that we haven't met yet."

She looked at me in silence with a puzzled expression.

CHAPTER EIGHT

TRUE TO A MEMORY

What was that idea? I thought about it the whole evening until I fell asleep. The next morning I awoke with a feeling that I had not slept at all for thinking.

The whole day was like that. With this thought in my mind I went to the Northern Sea Route Administration, to the Geographica Society and to the office of a journal devoted to Arctic affairs. At times I forgot about it, but only as though I had simply left it outside the door and then come out and run into it again like an old acquaintance.

Towards the evening, tired and irritable, I arrived at Korablev's. He was working when I came, marking exercise books. Two high stacks of them lay on the table and he sat there in his spectacles reading them, his poised pen coming down from time to time to pitilessly underline mistakes. I couldn't imagine where this work had sprung from, this being holiday-time and the school closed. But even at holiday-time he found something to do.

"You go on with your work, Ivan Pavlovich, and I'll sit here a bit. You don't mind? I'm tired."

For a while we sat in complete silence, broken only by the scratching of Korablev's pen and his angry growls. I had never noticed him growling so angrily while he worked.

"Well, Sanya, how goes it?"

"I'd like to ask you one question, Ivan Pavlovich."

"Go ahead."

"Do you know that Romashov has been visiting Vyshimirsky?"

"I do."

"And do you know what he went there for?"

"I do."

"Ivan Pavlovich," I said reproachfully. "I can't make you out, honestly, I can't! Knowing such a thing and never telling me a word!"

Korablev regarded me gravely. He was very serious that evening—probably a bit nervous, waiting for Katya, and not wanting me to see that he was.

"There are many things I haven't told you, Sanya," he retorted. "Because although you're a pilot now you're still capable of kicking somebody in the face."

"That was ages ago! An idea has come to me, Ivan Pavlovich. Of course, I may be wrong. So much the better."

"There you are, getting excited again," said Korablev.

"No I'm not. Don't you think that Romaska might have demanded of him ... might have said he would keep his mouth shut if Nikolai Antonich helped him to marry Katya?"

Korablev did not answer.

"Ivan Pavlovich!" I yelled.

"Getting excited?"

"I'm not. What I can't understand is how Katya could let him even entertain such an idea. Katya of all people!"

Korablev took a turn about the room with a thoughtful air. He removed his spectacles and his face looked sad. I caught him glancing several times at Maria Vasilievna's portrait, the one in which she was wearing the coral necklace. It stood in its old place on the desk.

"Yes, Katya," he said slowly. "Katya, whom you do not know at all."

That was something new. I did not know Katya?

"You don't know how she has been living all these years. But I do, because I've ... because I've taken an interest in her," Korablev said quickly. "All the more because nobody else seemed to have been taking much interest in her."

That was a dig at me.

"She was very miserable after her mother died," he went on. "And there was another person at her side who was just as miserable, if not more so. You know whom I mean."

He meant Nikolai Antonich.

"A very experienced and complex person," he continued. "A terrible man. But he did really love her mother all his life. And that's saying a lot. Her death brought the two closer together. That's a fact."

He lit a cigarette and his fingers shook slightly as he struck a match and then gently laid it in the ashtray.

"Then Romashov came on the scene," he went on. "Let me tell you that you don't know him either. He's another Nikolai Antonich, but cast in a different mould. For one thing, he's energetic. Secondly, he's entirely without morals, good or bad. Thirdly, he's capable of taking a decisive step, that's to say he's a man of action. And this man of action, who knows what he's after, comes one fine day to *his* teacher and friend and says to him: 'Nikolai Antonich, would you believe it-that Grigoriev fellow turned out to be quite right. You did swindle Captain Tatarinov's expedition. What's more, there are quite a number of shady things you're reticent about when answering personnel questionnaires...' Nina Kapitonovna overheard this conversation. She did not know what to make of it, so she came running to me. I got it right, though."

"That's interesting," I said.

There was a pause.

"As to what happened next," Korablev continued, "you can judge by results. You know Nikolai Antonich - he doesn't do things in a hurry. Probably this was first put to him half in a joke, casually. Then more and more seriously and repeatedly."

"But, Ivan Pavlovich, he cannot have persuaded her, can he?"

"Sanya, Sanya, what a funny chap you are! Would I be telling you all this if he had? But who knows? He would have got his way in the end, perhaps, the way he got—"

I understood what he was going to say: "The way he got Maria Vasilievna to marry him."

I did not know whether to stay or leave—it was already seven o'clock and Katya might ring the bell at any moment. I found it physically hard to tear myself away from him. I watched him sitting there smoking, his grey head bowed and his long legs stretched out, and thought how deeply he had loved Maria Vasilievna and how unlucky he had been and yet how true to her memory he had remained-for that was why he had watched over Katya so carefully all those years.

Then he suddenly said that I had better go.

"It will be easier for me to talk to her."

He saw me to the door and we took leave of each other till the following day.

It was still quite light when I went out into the street. The sun was setting and its rays were reflected in the windows on the opposite side of Sadovaya.

I stood at the entrance looking down the street in the direction from which Katya should be coming. I must have been waiting a long time, for the windows darkened one after another from left to right. Then I saw her, but not where I had been looking. She had come out of a side street and was standing on the pavement, waiting for the cars to pass. A sudden fear assailed me as I watched her crossing the road, wearing the same dress she had worn when we met outside the Bolshoi Theatre and looking very sad. She was quite near me now, but she walked with her head down and did not see me. As a matter of fact I did not want her to see me. I wished her mentally good cheer and all the best I could wish her at that moment, and I followed her with my eyes all the way to the door. She disappeared inside, but mentally I followed her. I could see Korablev coming forward to meet her, trying hard to appear calm, and taking a long time fitting a cigarette into his long holder before starting to talk.

Now the windows were darkening quickly and the glow of sunset lingered only in the two end windows of the block facing me.

It was only eight o'clock and I did not feel like going back to my hotel yet. For a long time I sat in a little public garden facing the entrance to our school. I went into the courtyard several times to see whether the light had gone on in Korablev's flat. But they were talking in the twilight, Korablev speaking while Katya listened in silence.

The sight of those dark windows brought back to me another conversation, when Korablev, suddenly jumping up, had paced the room restlessly with hands clasped on his chest. And Maria Vasilievna had sat there, erect, her face immobile, patting her hair from time to time with a slim hand. "Montigomo Hawk's Claw, I once used to call him." Now white rather than pale, she sat in front of us, smoking incessantly, the ash everywhere—even on her knees. She was calm and motionless, only now and again gently tugging at the string of coral beads round her neck as if it were choking her. She feared the truth, because she did not have the strength to stand up to it. But Katya was not afraid to face the truth, and all would be well when she learnt it.

The light had been on now for quite a time, and I saw Korablev's long black silhouette on the blind. Then Katya's appeared alongside, but soon moved away, as though she had uttered a single long sentence.

It was now quite dark outside, and that was good, because it was becoming awkward, my sitting so long in that garden and getting up from time to time to look at the windows.

Then all of a sudden Katya came out of the house alone and walked slowly down Sadovaya.

She was going home, no doubt. But she did not seem to be in any great hurry. She had something to think about before returning home. She walked along, thinking, and I followed her, and it was as if we were alone, all alone, in the vast city-Katya walking along and I following without her seeing me. The trams clanged as they dashed out into the square, and cars throbbed as they waited for the red traffic light to change, and I was thinking how hard it must be to keep your mind on anything amid that hideous noise-it was more likely to put you on the wrong track, make you think the wrong things. Not the things we all needed—I, and she, and the Captain, had he been alive, and Maria Vasilievna, had she been alive—all the living and the dead.

CHAPTER NINE

IT IS DECIDED - SHE GOES AWAY

It was already quite light in the hotel room. I had left the light burning, and I suppose that was why I looked rather pale in the mirror. I felt chilly and little shivers ran up my spine. I lifted the receiver and dialled a number. For a long time there was no answer, then at last I heard Katya's voice.

"Katya, it's me. You don't mind my ringing you so early?"

She said she didn't mind, though it had only just gone eight.

"Did I wake you up?"

"No."

I hadn't slept that night and was sure that she had not slept a wink either.

"May I come and see you, Katya?"

After a pause she said: "Yes."

A plumpish girl with fair hair coiled round her head opened the door to me. She was a complete stranger to me, and when I asked her, "Is Katya at home?", she blushed and answered, "Yes."

I took a quick step forward, not knowing where I was going, only knowing that it was to see Katya, but the girl checked me with a mocking. "Not so fast, Commander, not so fast!"

Then she started to laugh, so uproariously and explosively, that I could not but recognise her at once.

"Kiren!"

Katya came out of the dining-room just as Kiren and I stepped towards each other over some suitcases in the hall and all but fell into each other's arms, had not Kiren shyly backed away, so that I merely shook her hand.

"Kiren, is it really you? What are you doing here?"

"It's me all right," Kiren said, laughing. "But please don't call me Kiren. I'm not such a ninny now."

We began pumping each other's hand again vigorously. She must have spent the night with Katya, because she was wearing a dressing gown of hers, from which the buttons kept flying off while we did the packing. Two open suitcases stood in the hall and we packed away in them linen, books, various instruments-everything, in short, that was Katya's in that house. She was going away. I did not ask where. She was going away. It was all decided.

I did not ask because I knew every word that had passed between her and Korablev, every word she had spoken to Nikolai Antonich on her return. Nikolai Antonich was out of town, somewhere at Volokolamsk, but all the same I knew every word she would have said to him had she found him at home on her return from Korablev's.

She walked about determined and pale, talking in a loud voice, giving orders. But hers was the calm of a person with a bruised mind, and I sensed that it was best not to say anything. I just squeezed her hands hard and kissed them, and she responded with a gentle pressure of her fingers.

If anybody was flustered, it was the old lady. She greeted me coldly with a mere nod and swept past me haughtily. Then she suddenly came back and with a vindictive air thrust a blouse into the suitcase.

"Ah, well. It's all for the best."

She sat in the dining-room for quite a time, doing nothing but criticising the way we packed, then suddenly ran out into the kitchen to tell the maid off for not having bought enough of something or other.

It did not take us long to pack Katya's things. She had few belongings, though she was leaving a house in which she had spent most of her life. Everything there belonged to Nikolai Antonich. She did not leave a thing of hers behind, though. She did not want any overlooked trifle to remind her that she had once lived in that house.

She was taking the whole of herself away—her youth, her letters, her first drawings, which Maria Vasilievna had kept, her *Helen Robinson* and *The Century of Discovery,* which I had borrowed from her in my third form.

In my ninth form I had borrowed other books from her, and when their turn came she called me into her room and shut the door.

"Sanya, I want you to have these books," she said with a break in her voice. "They're Daddy's, and I've always cherished them. But now I want to give them to you. Here's Nansen, and various sailing directions and his own book."

Then she led me into Nikolai Antonich's room and took the portrait of the Captain down from the wall-that fine portrait of the naval officer with the broad forehead, square jaw and light, dancing eyes.

"I don't want to leave him this," she said firmly, and I carried the portrait into the dining-room and carefully packed it away in a bag containing pillows and a blanket.

It was the only thing belonging to Nikolai Antonich which Katya was taking away with her. If she could she would have carried away with her from this accursed house the very memory of the Captain.

I don't know whom the little ship's compass—the one that had once caught my eye-belonged to, but I slipped it into one of the suitcases when Katya was not looking. It had belonged to the Captain in any case.

That was all. It must have been the most deserted place in the world when, the packing done with and coats over our arms, we took leave of Nina Kapitonovna in the hall. She was staying behind, but not for long—only until Katya had moved into the room which her institute was giving her.

"It's not for long," the old lady said, then she broke down and kissed Katya.

Kiren stumbled on the stairs, sat down abruptly on the suitcase to prevent herself from tumbling down, and burst out laughing. "You ninny!" Katya said crossly. I followed them down and pictured to myself Nikolai Antonich coming up the stairs, ringing the door bell and listening to what the old lady had to tell him. I saw him pass a trembling hand over his bald head and cross into his study with dragging footsteps. Alone in an empty house.

And he will realise that Katya would never come back.

CHAPTER TEN

SIVTSEV-VRAZHEK

Until then it had been just one of Moscow's ordinary, crooked little streets, of which there are many around the Arbat. But with Katya now living in it, Sivtsev-Vrazhek had changed surprisingly. It had become the street in which now Katya lived and which was therefore totally unlike any other Moscow street. The name itself, which had always struck me as funny, now sounded significant. It stood for Katya, like everything else that was associated with her.

I came to Sivtsev-Vrazhek every day. Katya and Kiren would not be home yet when I arrived, and Kiren's mother, Alexandra Dmitrievna, would keep me company. Apart from being an exemplary mother she was a professional reciter who gave readings from the classics at Moscow workers' clubs. A greying, romantic little lady, not at all like her daughter.

Then Katya would come in. Korablev had been right. I did not know her. Not only in the sense that I didn't know many facts about her life, such as the fact that a year ago her party (she had been working as the head of a party) had discovered a rich deposit of gold in the Southern Urals, or that some photographs of hers had won first prize at an amateur photographers' exhibition. I did not know the strong fibre of her stuff, her straightforward, honest, sensible attitudes-all that

Korablev had summed up so well in the phrase "a serious-minded sincere soul". She seemed much older than me, especially when she talked about art—a subject I had sadly neglected in recent years. Then suddenly the old Katya would emerge-the girl who had a passion for staging explosions and was deeply stirred at the fact that "Hernan Cortes, accompanied by the good wishes of the Tiascalans, set out on his expedition and within a few days reached the populous capital city of the Incas".

I was reminded of Cortes by a photograph of Katya on horseback, wearing breeches and high boots and a broadbrimmed hat and with a carbine slung across her back. A prospector! The sight of that photograph would have pleased the Captain.

Several days passed in this wise without our having yet talked about what had happened since we last met, though enough had happened to last us a lifetime talking about it. We both seemed to feel that it was first necessary to get used to each other anew. Not a word about Nikolai Antonich, or Romashov, or my being guilty about her. This was not so easy, considering that almost every evening the old lady came visiting.

At first she used to make ceremonious calls, looking prim and proper in a dress with leg-of-mutton sleeves, and telling all kinds of stories—that is, until Nikolai Antonich's return. But one day she came running in looking upset and said in a loud whisper: "He's arrived." And forthwith closeted herself with Katya.

When leaving, she said gruffly: "You've got to have tact to live with people."

But Katya did not answer. She merely kissed her goodbye with a thoughtful air.

The next day the old lady came with a tear-stained face, looking tired and carrying an umbrella. She sat down in the hall.

"He's taken ill," she said. "I called a doctor. A homeopath. But he sent him away. 'I've given my whole life to her,' he says, 'and this is her gratitude.' "

She gave a little sob.

" 'It was the last thing that gave me a hold on life. Now it's all over.' Something like that."

Obviously, it wasn't all over, because Nikolai Antonich got well again, although he had had a severe heart attack which had kept him in bed for a few days. He asked for Katya. But Katya did not go to see him. I heard her tell the old lady: "Grandma, ill or well, alive or dead, I don't want to see him. D'you understand?"

"I understand," Nina Kapitonovna answered. "Just the way her father was too," she complained to Kiren's mother as she left. "Talk about obstinate! Sheer cussedness, I call it!"

But Nikolai Antonich rallied and the old lady cheered up. Now she sometimes dropped in twice a day, so that we always had the latest news about Nikolai Antonich and Romashka. One day Katya herself spoke about Romashka.

"He called on me at the office," she said briefly. "But I sent him word that I had no time for him and never would have."

"They're writing a letter," the old lady said one day. "All about pilot G. Pilot G. shouldn't be surprised if they're informing on somebody. And that holy Joe-is he in a fume! But Nikolai Antonich-he says nothing. Just sits there, all swollen up, and doesn't say a word. Sits in my shawl."

Valya paid several visits to Sivtsev-Vrazhek, and on these occasions everybody dropped what he or she was doing and stopped talking to watch the way he was courting Kiren. He really was courting her according to all the rules of the game, fully convinced that no one suspected it.

He brought her potted flowers, always the same kind, so that her room was turned into a little nursery of tea-roses and primulas. He saw me and Katya as if in a dream and came awake only with Kiren and sometimes with her mother, to whom he also gave presents—on one occasion he gave her *A Book for the Reciter,* 1917 edition.

During his waking spells he told us amusing stories from the life of jumping squirrels and bats.

It was just as well that Kiren did not need much to make her laugh.

Thus did we spend the evenings at Sivtsev-Vrazhek—the last evenings before my return to the Arctic.

I was kept pretty busy. My plan to organise a search for Captain Tatarinov's expedition was received without enthusiasm-or had I not gone about it the right way?

I wrote several articles-one for the journal *Civil Aviation* about my method of anchoring a grounded plane during a blizzard, another for *Pravda* about the navigator's diaries, and my Memo for the Northern Sea Route Administration. Within a few days, on the very eve of my departure, I was to read my paper on the drift of the *St. Maria* at a special session of the Geographical Society.

And then, one late night, when I returned to my hotel in a cheerful frame of mind, I was handed, together with the key to my room, a letter and a newspaper.

The letter was a brief one. The Secretary of the Geographical Society notified me that my paper could not be read as I had not submitted it in writing within the proper time. The newspaper fell open as I picked it up and I saw an article headed: "In Defence of a Scientist". I started to read it and lines grew blurred before my eyes.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A HECTIC DAY

This is what the article said:

1. That there lived in Moscow a well-known educationalist and public figure. Professor N. A. Tatarinov, author of a number of articles on the history of Arctic exploration and development.

2. That an airman by the name of G. was making the round of various offices connected with Arctic affairs and casting slurs upon this worthy scientist, whom he accused of swindling (!) the expedition led by his cousin. Captain I. L. Tatarinov.

3. That this airman G. intended to read a paper on these lines, evidently regarding his slander as a scientific achievement of major importance.

4. That the conduct of this man, who was sullying the good name of Soviet Arctic workers, could bear looking into on the part of the Northern Sea Route Administration.

The article was signed "I. Krylov", and I was surprised at the editors using the name of the great man for such an article. I had no doubt that Nikolai Antonich had written it-this was the "letter" the old lady had been talking about. The newspaper was addressed to me.

Hell, what if it isn't him? It was three o'clock and I was still pacing the room, thinking. This letter from the Geographical Society now-that surely was his doing. Korablev told me that Nikolai Antonich was a member of the Geographical Society, and scolded me for having told Romashka about my paper. But the article was his too! He'd lost his head, what with Katya going away.

I pictured him sitting in that old woman's shawl, listening in silence to Romashka's insults. It was quite possible!

The last thing they would wish was to have the N.S.R.A. call me out and demand an explanation. It was just what I wanted! I thought of this as I lay in my bed. "Conduct sullying the good name of Soviet Arctic workers..." What conduct? I hadn't spoken to anyone about it yet. They thought they'd scare me, make me back out.

Possibly, if it hadn't been for this article, I would have left Moscow without having accomplished anything worth mention for the Captain's cause. The article acted as a spur. I had to do something now, the sooner the better.

It would be wrong to think that I was as calm then as I am now, when I am looking back at it. Several times I caught myself playing with crazy ideas of a kind that come within the jurisdiction of the C.I.D. But I had only to remember Katya and her words: "ill or well, dead or alive, I do not want to see him"-for everything to fall into its proper place, and I was really surprised at the calm way I spoke and acted that busy day.

I had a plan worked out first thing in the morning-a very simple plan, but one which showed how fed up I was with having to deal with secretaries and clerks. It was this:

1. To go to *Pravda*. I had to be there in any case as I had to hand in the promised article before my departure.

2. To call on C.

The idea of going to see C., that famous C. who had once been our hero at the Leningrad Flying School and afterwards became Hero of the Soviet Union, a man the whole country knew and loved-this idea occurred to me during the night, but had then seemed to be too audacious. I wondered whether I could presume to phone him. Would he remember me? I had only been an air cadet when we last met.

But now I had made up my mind. I did not think he would refuse to see me, even if he did not remember me.

I don't know who it was that answered the phone-his wife, perhaps.

"This is air pilot Grigoriev."

"Yes?"

"I'd very much like to see Comrade C. I've come down from the Arctic, and it's very important for me to see him."

"Then come along."

"When?"

"Today, if you can. He'll be home from the airfield at ten o'clock."

I went to *Pravda,* and this time I had to wait two hours to see my journalist. At last he arrived.

"Ah, airman G.?" he said in a rather friendly tone. "The man who sullies the name?"

"That's him."

"What's it all about?"

"Let me explain," I said calmly.

There followed a very serious talk in the private office of the Editor-in-Chief, in the course of which I placed on his desk, one after another:

(a) The Captain's last letter (a copy).

(b) The navigator's letter beginning with the words: "I hasten to inform you that Ivan Lvovich is alive and well" (a copy).

(c) The navigator's diaries.

(d) The story of the hunter Ivan Vilka taken down by me and witnessed by the doctor.

(e) Vyshimirsky's story certified by Korablev.

(o A photograph of the boat-hook bearing the inscription "Schooner *St. Maria".*

I think it was a useful talk, because one very serious man shook me warmly by the hand, while another said that my article on the drift of the *St. Maria* would be published in one of the next issues of the newspaper.

It was at least six kilometres from the *Pravda* offices to where C. lived, but I did not remember until I had gone half way that I could have taken a tram. I ran like mad, thinking of how I was going to tell him about my talk at the *Pravda* offices.

At last I climb the stairs of a new apartment house, and stop in front of the door and wipe my face-it is very hot-trying to think slowly about something-a sure way of keeping calm.

The door is opened, I give my name and hear his deep voice from one of the rooms: "Somebody to see me?"

And now this man, whom we loved in our youth and of whose wonderful flights we had heard so much, this man comes towards me holding out his strong hand.

"Comrade C.," I say, "you would hardly remember me. My name is Grigoriev. We met in Leningrad when I was an air cadet."

After a slight pause he says with pleasure: "Why, of course! You were a regular ace. Sure I remember you!"

And we go into his room, and I begin my story, feeling more excited than ever at the thought that he has remembered me.

It was at this meeting with C. that he gave me his photograph, writing across it the words: "If it's worth doing at all, do it well." He said I belonged to the breed who have "a long-distance ticket". He heard me out and said that he would telephone the N.S.R.A. the next day and speak to the Chief about my plan.

CHAPTER TWELVE

ROMASHKA

It was a little past eleven when I took my leave of C and returned to my hotel. Rather a late hour for visitors. But a visitor there was for me, though an uninvited one.

The man at the desk said: "Someone to see you."

And Romashka rose to meet me.

He must have prepared himself for this visit in body as well as in soul, for I had never seen him look so smart. He was wearing a loose overcoat of a steely colour and a soft hat which did not so much sit as stand on his big misshaped head. He had an odour of eau-de-cologne about him.

"Ah, Romashka," I said cheerfully. "How do you do, old Owl?"

He seemed shaken by this greeting.

"Ah, yes. Owl," he said smiling. "I quite forgot that you used to call me that at school. Fancy remembering all those school nicknames!"

He, too, was trying to appear at ease.

"I remember everything, old chap. You want to see me?"

"If you're not too busy."

"Not at all," I said. "I'm absolutely free."

In the lift he studied me narrowly all the time, apparently trying to make out whether I was drunk, and if I was, how he could profit by it. But I was not drunk. I had quaffed only one glass of wine to the health of the great airman who had held out to me the hand of friendship.

"Nice room, this," he remarked as he accepted the armchair I politely offered him.

"Not bad."

I was expecting him to ask how much I paid for the room, but he did not.

"This is quite a decent hotel," he said. "As good as the Metropole."

"I daresay it is."

He was waiting for me to begin the conversation. But I sat there with my legs crossed, smoking, deeply absorbed in a study of the "Rules for Visitors" which lay under the sheet of glass covering the desk. Finally, he sighed quite openly, and began.

"Look here, Sanya, there are quite a number of things we must talk over," he said gravely. "I think we're sufficiently civilised to discuss and settle matters in a peaceful manner. Don't you think so?"

Evidently, he had not forgotten the anything but peaceful manner in which I had once settled matters with him. But his voice hardened with every word he uttered.

"I don't know what induced Katya suddenly to leave home, but I have a right to ask whether the reasons for it have anything to do with your appearance on the scene?"

"Why don't you ask Katya that?" I said coolly.

He fell silent. His ears flushed, his eyes snapped viciously and his brow smoothened. I looked at him with interest.

"But from what I know, she went away with you," he resumed in a slightly suppressed voice.

"So she did. As a matter of fact I helped her pack."

"I see," he rasped. One eye was now almost closed and the other squinted—not a pretty sight. I had never seen him like that before. "I see," he repeated.

"Yes, that's how it is."

"I see."

We fell silent.

"Look here," he resumed, "we didn't finish our talk that time at Korablev's anniversary. I want to tell you that in a general way I know all about the expedition of the *St. Maria*. I was interested in it, too, the same as you are, only from a different angle, I daresay."

I did not answer. I knew what that angle was.

"Among other things, you were interested, I believe, is finding out what Nikolai Antonich's role was in that expedition. At least, that's what I gathered from our conversation."

He could have gathered that in other ways too, but I let his remark pass. I wasn't sure yet what he was driving at. "I think I can be of great service to you in this." "Really?" "Yes."

He suddenly lunged towards me, and I instinctively jumped up and stood behind my chair.

"Listen," he muttered, "I know such things about him! Such things! I have evidence that will settle his hash, if only you go about it the right way. What d'you think he is?"

He repeated the last phrase three times, moving up to me so close that I was obliged to take him by the shoulders and gently push him away. But he didn't even notice this.

"Things that he's even forgotten himself," Romashka went on. "In papers."

He was referring, of course, to the papers he had taken from Vyshimirsky.

"I know why you quarrelled with him. You told him that he had swindled the expedition and he threw you out. But it's true. You were right."

It was the second time I had heard this acknowledged, but now it gave me little pleasure to hear it. I merely said in feigned surprise:

"You don't say?"

"It's him all right!" Romashka repeated with a sort of rapturous glee. "I'll help you. I'll hand it all over to you, all my evidence. We'll send him toppling."

I should have kept silent, but I could not help asking:

"How much?"

He collected himself.

"You can take it any way you please," he said. "But all I ask of you is that you should go away."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"Without Katya?"

"Yes."

"That's interesting. In other words, you are asking me to give her up."

"I love her," he said almost haughtily.

"You do. That's interesting. And we're not to correspond with each other, I suppose?"

He was silent.

"Wait a minute, I won't be long," I said, and left the room.

The floor lady was sitting at her desk. I asked permission to use her telephone, and while I was talking I kept an eye on the corridor to make sure that Romashka did not leave. But he did not-it probably did not occur to him that I had gone out to make a call.

"Nikolai Antonich? Grigoriev here." He asked me to repeat the name, evidently thinking that he had misheard. "Nikolai Antonich," I said politely, "excuse me for disturbing you so late. But I must see you."

For a moment he did not answer. Then he said: "In that case, come along."

"Nikolai Antonich, if you don't mind I'd like you to call at my place. Believe me it's very important, not so much for me as for you."

There was another pause and I could hear him breathing at the other end.

"When? I can't come today."

"But it must be today. Right now. Nikolai Antonich," I raised my voice, "believe me this once, at least. You will come. I'm ringing off now."

He did not ask where I was staying, and that was proof enough, if proof were needed, that it was he who had sent me the newspaper containing the article "In Defence of a Scientist". But just then I had other things on my mind and I dismissed the matter and went back to Romashka.

I don't remember ever having lied and shuffled the way I did during the twenty minutes before Nikolai Antonich arrived. I pretended that I did not care at all what Nikolai Antonich had ever been, I asked what the papers were about, and assured him in a voice nasal with cunning that I could not go away without Katya. Then came a knock at the door and I cried out: "Come in!"

Nikolai Antonich came in and stopped in the doorway.

"Good evening, Nikolai Antonich," I said.

I wasn't looking at Romashka but when afterwards I did I saw him sitting on the edge of the chair, his head drawn down into his shoulders with an anxious listening air-a real owl, and a sinister one too.

"There, Nikolai Antonich," I went on very calmly, "you probably know this gentleman. He goes by the name of Romashov, your favourite pupil and assistant, and almost next door to a kinsman, if I am not mistaken. I've invited you here to give you the gist of our talk."

Nikolai Antonich was still standing by the door, very erect, surprisingly upright, coat and hat in his hand. Afterwards he dropped the hat.

"This Romashov here," I proceeded, "came to me an hour and a half ago with the following proposition. He offered me the use of certain evidence which shows, first, that you swindled Captain Tatarinov's expedition and, second, that you have a number of other shady dealings to your name of which no mention is made by you in your personnel questionnaires."

This was when he dropped his hat.

"I have the impression," I continued, "that this is not the first time he has been offering this merchandise for sale. I don't know, I may be wrong."

"Nikolai Antonich!" Romashka suddenly squealed. "It's a lie. Don't you believe him. He's lying."

I waited until he had finished shouting.

"It's all the same to me now, of course," I went on. "It's between you two. But you deliberately..."

I felt my cheek beginning to twitch, and I did not like it, because I had sworn to keep cool when talking to them.

"But you deliberately arranged for this man to marry Katya. You were trying to talk her into it, because you were afraid of him. And now he comes here, shouting: 'We'll send him toppling.' "

As though suddenly coming awake, Nikolai Antonich took a step forward and stared at Romashka. He stared at him hard and long, and the tense silence was beginning to tell even on me.

"Nikolai Antonich," Romashka began again in a stammering, piteous voice.

Nikolai Antonich kept staring. Then he began to speak, and the sound of his voice, the broken, quavery voice of an old man, astonished me.

"Why did you invite me here?" he said. "I am ill, it's hard for me to speak. You wanted me to see that he's a scoundrel. That's no news to me. You wanted to crush me again, but you can't do more than you have already done-and done irreparably." He drew a deep breath. I realised that it really was hard for him to speak.

"I leave to her conscience," he went on just as quietly, but in a voice hardened and bitter, "the act she has committed in going away without saying a word to me, believing the base slander of which I have been a victim all my life."

I was silent. Romashka poured out a glass of water with a shaking hand and offered it to him.

"Nikolai Antonich," he mumbled, "you mustn't get excited."

But Nikolai Antonich thrust his arm aside with a violent gesture and the water spilled over the carpet.

"I accept no reproaches, no regrets," he said, suddenly snatching off his glasses and twisting them about in his fingers. "It's her affair. Her own fate. All I wanted for her was happiness. But my cousin's memory—that will never yield to anybody," he said hoarsely, and his face became sullen, puffy, thick-lipped. "I would gladly accept this suffering as a punishment-even unto death-because life has long been a burden to me. But I deny all these monstrous, shameful accusations. And not even a thousand false witnesses would make anyone believe that I killed this man with his great ideas and his great heart."

I wanted to remind Nikolai Antonich that he had not always held such a high opinion of his cousin, but he would not let me get a word in.

"I recognise only one witness," he went on, "Ivan himself. He alone can accuse me, and if I were to blame, he alone would have the right to do so."

He broke down and wept. He cut his fingers with his glasses and fumbled about in his pocket for *his* handkerchief. Romashka ran up and offered him one, but Nikolai Antonich pushed his hand aside again.

"Even the dead, I think, would have spoken," he said and reached for his hat, breathing heavily.

"Nikolai Antonich," I said very calmly, "I don't want you to think that I intend to devote my whole life trying to convince mankind of your guilt. It has been clear to me for a long time and now it is clear to others too. I did not invite you here to go over all this again. I simply considered it my duty to show you the real face of this scoundrel. I have no use for the things he has been telling me about you—I have known them long before. Don't you want to say anything to him?"

Nikolai Antonich was silent.

"Then get out!" I said to Romashka.

He ran over to Nikolai Antonich and began whispering something to him. But the latter stood stiffly, staring straight in front of him. Only now did I notice how he had aged these last few days, how defected and pitiful he looked. But I felt no pity for him, none whatever.

"Get out!" I repeated to Romashka.

He did not go but kept whispering. Then he took Nikolai Antonich by the arm and led him to the door. This was unexpected, seeing that it was Romashka I had ordered out, not Nikolai Antonich, whom I had asked to come. I had wanted to ask him who had written an article "In Defence of a Scientist", and whether I. Krylov was a descendant of the famous fabulist. But I was too late—they had already left the room.

I hadn't set them at odds after all. They walked slowly down the corridor arm in arm, and only once did Nikolai Antonich stop for a moment. He started to tear his hair. He had no hair to speak of, but a sort of childish down came away in his fingers and he stared at it with agonised amazement. Romashka restrained him and brushed his overcoat, and they moved along sedately until they disappeared round a bend in the corridor.

On the eve of my departure C. phoned to tell me that he had spoken to the Chief of the N.S.R.A. and read out to him my Memo. His answer was a favourable one. It was too late to send out an expedition this year, but it was highly probable that they would do this next year. My plan was detailed and convincing, but the part dealing with the route needed clarifying. The historical section was most interesting. I would be summoned to the N.S.R.A. and would receive further notice.

I spent all that day around the shops. I wanted to buy a present for Katya, as we were parting again. It was no easy job. A tea-cosy? But she had no teapot. A dress? But I could never tell crepe de Chine from faille de Chine. A camera? She needed one badly, but I didn't have enough money for a Leica. I would probably have ended by buying nothing at all, had I not met Valya in the Arbat. He was standing before the window of a bookshop, thinking—I would have once guessed unerringly—of animals. But now he had other things on his mind.

"Valya," I said, "have you any money?"

"I have."

"How much?"

"Five hundred rubles."

"Let's have it."

He laughed.

"You're not going to Ensk again for Katya, are you?"

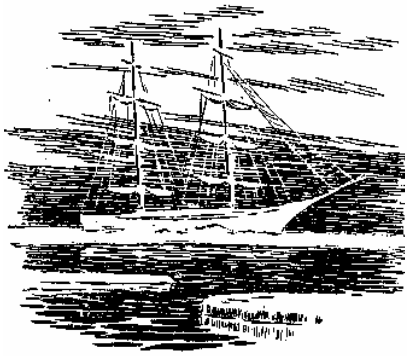
We went into a shop and bought a Leica.

As far as the rest of the world was concerned I was leaving at midnight, but with Katya I started taking my leave in the morning and kept it up all day, now dropping in on her at home, now at her office. We

were parting only for a short time. In August she was to come to Zapolarie, and I was expecting to be called out before that-in July, perhaps. Nevertheless I thought of our parting with a pang, fearing that it might be a long one again.

Valya came to see me off at the station and brought a copy of *Pravda* containing my article. It was printed just as I had written it, except that in one passage the style had been improved and the article as a whole had been condensed to half its size. The excerpts from the diaries, however, were printed in full. "I shall never forget that leave-taking, that pale, inspired face with its inward look! How different from that once ruddy-faced, cheerful man with his fund of yarns and funny stories, the idol of his crew, a man who always came to his task, however difficult, with a joke on his lips! Nobody moved after his speech. He stood there with closed eyes, as though nerving himself for the last word of farewell. But instead of words a low moan broke from his lips and tears glistened in the corners of his eyes..."

Katya and I read this in the corridor of my carriage, and I felt her hair against my face, felt that she, too, could hardly keep back her tears.



The End of Book One

BOOK TWO





PART SIX

FROM THE DIARY OF KATYA TATARINOVA

YOUTH CONTINUES

July 6, 1935. We spent only one evening together all the time Sanya was in Moscow. He came in looking very tired, and Alexandra Dmitrievna went out of the room at once. I made Sanya some tea-he likes his tea strong-and watched him eating and drinking until he made me sit down and have tea with him.

Then he suddenly recalled how we used to go skating together, and made up some story about his kissing me on the cheek at the rink, and finding it "awfully firm, downy and cold." And I recalled how he had acted as judge at the trial of Eugene Onegin and had kept staring gloomily at me all the time.

"And do you remember-'Grigoriev is a brilliant personality, but he hasn't read Dickens'?"

"Don't I! Have you read him since?"

"No," Sanya said ruefully. "I never had the time. I read Voltaire, though—'The Maid of Orleans'. For some reason we have a lot of Voltaire's books in our library at Zapolarie."

Just then the phone rang. I went to answer it and spent a good half hour talking with my old professor. She called me "dear child" and had to know absolutely everything-where I now had my lunch and whether I had bought that pretty lampshade at Muir's. When I got back Sanya was asleep. I called him, then all at once I felt a pang of pity for him. I squatted down beside him and began to study his face ever so close.

That evening Sanya gave me the navigator's diary and all the papers and photographs. The diary was in a special paper case with a lock to it. After Sanya left I spent a long time examining these pages with torn edges, covered with close-written, crooked lines, which suddenly ran helplessly wide as though the hand had gone on writing while the mind had wandered off God knows where.

The boat-hook with the words "Schooner *St. Maria"* on it had been left behind at Zapolarie, but Sanya had brought a photograph of it. I

don't suppose there is another boat-hook in the world which photographs so well!

I promised Sanya that I would write every day, but there is nothing new to write about every day. I am still living at Kiren's, reading a lot, working a lot, though it isn't very convenient, because the boxes of collected specimens stand in the hallway, and I have to draw my maps on the piano lid. For the first time this summer I did not go out on field-work. I have to work up the old material, and the Bashkir Geological Survey Board, where I am employed, have allowed me to remain in Moscow;

The map is a difficult one, quite a bit of a muddle, and I have to do everything over again. But the harder it is the more I like doing it. Though my nights are so dreary, I live with a feeling that all the painful experiences, the dim miseries of the past have been left behind me, and I can look forward to something interesting and new, something that makes me feel at once light-hearted, and happy, and a little afraid.

July 7, 1935. At all the offices where Sanya had called on his last day in town, he left my telephone number-both with the N.S.R.A. and *Pravda*. I was a little alarmed when he told me about it.

"Who am I supposed to be.? Who are they to ask for?"

"Katerina Tatarinova-Grigorieva," Sanya answered gravely.

I thought he was joking. But three days after he had gone someone phoned and asked for Katerina Tatarinova-Grigorieva.

It was a well-known journalist from *Pravda*. He said that Sanya's article had had wide repercussions and that enquiries concerning its author had even been made by the Arctic Institute.

"Give your husband my congratulations."

I was on the point of answering that he wasn't my husband yet, but thought better of it.

"If I am not mistaken I have the pleasure of speaking to Captain Tatarinov's daughter?"

"Yes."

"Have you any more material relating to your father's life and activities?"

I said I had, but without the permission of Alexander Ivanovich— this was the first time I called Sanya by his first name and patronymic – I could not let him have it.

"Never mind, we'll write to him."

There was a phone call from *Civil Aviation,* too, asking where to send the copy of the paper carrying his article about the anchoring of a grounded aircraft during a blizzard—and I did not even know that he had written such an article. I asked for two copies—one for myself. After that there was another phone call from *Literaturnaya Gazeta* asking what Grigoriev this was, whether it was the author who had written such and such a book.

But the most important was my talk with C. I don't know what Sanya told him about me, but he spoke to me as though I were an old friend.

"Are you receiving a pension?" I was puzzled. "For your father."

"No."

"You should put in for one."

Then he said with a laugh that the people at the N.S.R.A. had got the wind up on hearing that my father had discovered Severnaya Zemlya. Their records attributed it to somebody else.

"I don't know..." he went on, "somehow I don't like the way they are dealing with this."

"I thought an expedition had been decided on." "So did I, but now it suddenly seems that it hasn't. When I told them to send him out with the *Pakhtusov,* they said there was a pilot on board already. What if there is! Your man has definite ideas." He said it just like that—"your man".

"Never mind, I'll have another go at them. Drop in and see us some day."

I said I should be very happy to, and we said goodbye. Every day I get a letter, sometimes two letters, from Romashov. The envelopes are addressed "Second Party, Bashkir Geological Survey Board", as though they were mailed to an institution. I am something of an institution though, as there was no other way of arranging for me to work in Moscow. But the address is a joke, and a joke, which is repeated every day becomes a nuisance.

At first I used to read these letters, then I started to return them unopened, and then stopped reading and returning them altogether. But somehow I cannot get myself to burn these letters; they lie about all over the place, and when I come across them I snatch my hand away.

I run into the writer of these letters the same way. He used to be a very busy man, and I just can't make out how he finds the time to stand about in the street whenever I come out of the house. I meet him in shops and at the theatre, and it's very unpleasant, because he bows to me and I ignore him. When he makes a movement to come up, I turn away.

He called on Valya, and cried, and yelled at him like mad when Valya jokingly cited a similar example of unrequited love among the chimpanzees.

Altogether he has begun to loom so large in my life that I am beginning to feel morbid about it. The moment I close my eyes I see him in front of me in his new grey coat and soft hat, which he has taken to wearing on my account-he told me as much himself one day.

July 12, 1935. Of course, it was a very strange idea of mine-to go to Romashov and get from him those papers which Vyshimirsky had handed over to him. It was a cruel thought—to go to him after all those letters and the flowers which I sent back. But the more I thought of it the more the idea appealed to me. I saw myself coming in and him staring at me, bewildered, without saying a word, then turning pale, dashing down the corridor and flinging open the door of his room, while I said coolly: "Misha, I've come to see you on business."

The curious thing about it is that everything happened exactly as I had pictured it. I have just come away from Mm.

He was wearing a warm suit of blue pyjamas and hadn't had time to comb his hair yet. It was wet-apparently after a bath-and hung down his forehead in yellow strands. He stood pale and silent, while I took my coat off. Then he stepped swiftly towards me.

"Katya!"

"Misha, I've come to see you on business," I repeated coolly. "Get dressed and comb your hair. Where can I wait?"

"Yes, of course..."

He ran down the corridor and flung open the door of his room.

"In here, please. Excuse me..."

"On the contrary. Excuse me."

We had visited him the previous year, the three of us-Nikolai Antonich, Grandma and myself, and Grandma, by the way, had kept throwing out hints all the evening that he had borrowed forty rubles from her and not given it back.

I had liked his room at the time, but I thought it looked even better now. It was done up in pleasing light-grey tones, the door and built-in cupboard somewhat of a lighter shade than the walls. The upholstered furniture was soft and comfortable, and everything was attractively arranged. The window looked out on Dog Place-my favourite spot in Moscow. I have loved Dog Place ever since a child-that little square with its monument to dogs that had died, and all the quaint little turnings that ran off it.

"Misha," I said when he had come back, combed, scented, and wearing a new blue suit which I had not seen before, "I have come to answer all your letters. What's that nonsense you write about my repenting it later if I didn't marry you! It's silly schoolboy behaviour to keep writing me every day when you know that I do not even read your letters. You know perfectly well that I never intended to marry you, and you have no reason to write that I misled you."

It was rather frightening to watch the way his face changed. He had come in with an eager, happy look, as if hoping, yet scarcely able to believe it-and now hope was dying with every word I uttered and his face drained slowly of life. He turned away and looked down on the floor.

"It's too long to explain why I allowed you to speak about it before. There were many reasons. But you are an intelligent man. You could not have made the mistake of believing that I loved you."

"But you won't be happy with him!"

His knees were shaking, and he covered his eyes several times in a strange way. I was reminded of what Sanya had said about him sleeping with his eyes open.

"I'll kill myself and you," he whispered.

"You can kill yourself for all I care," I said very calmly. "I don't want to quarrel with you, but really, what right have you to talk that way? You started an intrigue, as though girls in our day can be won by means of idiotic intrigues! You haven't a shred of self-esteem, otherwise you wouldn't be dogging my steps every day. The best thing you can do is listen to me and say nothing, because I know everything you are going to say. And now, to come to the point: what are those papers you took from Vyshimirsky?"

"What papers?"

"Don't pretend, Misha. You know perfectly well what I am talking about. The papers you used to threaten Nikolai Antonich with, papers which showed him up as having been a stock-jobber and which you afterwards offered to let Sanya have if he gave me up and went away. Hand them over to me this minute. Do you hear—this minute!"

He closed his eyes several times and sighed. Then he made a motion to get down on his knees. But I said very loudly: "Misha, don't you dare!"

He didn't do it, just clenched his teeth, and such a look of despair came into his face that my heart was wrung despite myself.

Not that I felt sorry for him. I had a sort of guilty feeling that I was making him suffer in that dumb way. I would have felt better if he had started cursing me. But he just stood there saying nothing.

"Misha," I began again with some agitation. "Don't you see those papers are of no use to you any more. You can't change anything, and I feel ashamed that I know practically nothing about my father at a time when all the newspapers are writing about him. I need them-1 and nobody else."

I don't know what he imagined when I uttered the words "I and nobody else", but an ugly look suddenly came into his eyes and he threw his head up and took a turn about the room. He was thinking of Sanya.

"I won't give you anything!" he said brusquely.

"Yes you will! If you don't it will mean it was all lies-everything that you wrote to me."

Suddenly he went out and I was left alone. It was very quiet. I could hear children's voices from the street and once or twice the tentative hoot of a motor car. It was disturbing, his going out and not coming back for so long. What if he did do something to himself? My heart went cold and I stepped out into the corridor, listening. Not a sound except that of water running somewhere.

"Misha!"

The door of the bathroom was ajar. I looked in and saw him bending over the bath. For a moment I couldn't see what he was doing-it was dark in there, for he had not switched the light on.

"I shan't be long," he said clearly, without turning round.

He stood bent up almost double, holding his head under the tap. The water was pouring over his face and shoulders, and his new suit was drenched.

"What are you doing? Are you crazy!"

"Go along, I'll soon be back," he repeated gruffly.

A few minutes later he did come back-collarless, red-eyed— bringing four ordinary blue scrap-books.

"There they are," he said. "I have no other papers. Take them."

This may have been another lie for all I knew, because, on opening one of the books at random, I found that it contained some sort of printed matter, like a page torn out of a book, but you couldn't talk to him any more, and so I merely thanked him very politely.

"Thanks, Misha."

And went home.

July 12. Night. There they lie in front of me, four thick, blue scrap-books, old ones, that is, from before the revolution because they all have on them the trademark "Friedrich Kahn". The first page of the first book bears the inscription in ornamental lettering with shading to each letter: "Whereof I have been witness in real life" and the date-"1916. Memoirs." Further on there are simply cuttings from old newspapers, some of which I have never heard of, such as: *The Stock Exchange Gazette, Zemshchina, Gazeta-Kopeika*. The cuttings were pasted in lengthways in columns, but in some places also crosswise, for instance this one: "Tatarinov's expedition. Buy postcards: (1) Prayer before sailing; (2) The *St. Maria* in the roadsteads."

When I came home I quickly looked through each book from cover to cover. There were no "papers" here, as far as I understood this word from my conversation with Korablev, only articles and news items concerning the expedition from St. Petersburg to Vladivostok along the coast of Siberia.

What sort of articles were they? I started to read them and could not tear myself away. The whole of life in the old days was unfolded before me and I read on with a bitter sense of irreparable doom and resentment. Irreparable because the schooner *St. Maria* was doomed before she set sail-that is what I gathered from these articles. And resentment because I now learnt how treacherously my father had been deceived, and how badly his trustful and guileless nature had let him down.

This was how one "eye-witness" described the sailing of the *St. Maria:*

"The masts of the schooner, bound on her distant voyage are poorly flagged. The hour for setting sail draws near. The last 'prayer for seamen and seafarers', the last farewell speeches. Slowly the *St. Maria* gets under way. The shore recedes farther and farther until houses and people merge in a single colourful strip. A solemn moment! The last link with land and home is severed. But we feel sad and ashamed at this poor send-off, at these indifferent faces which register merely curiosity. Evening draws in. The *St. Maria* stops in the mouth of the Dvina. The people who are seeing her off drink a glass of champagne to the success of the expedition. A last handshake, a last embrace, then back to town aboard the waiting *Lebedin,* the women standing by the rail of the little steamboat, waving and waving, brushing the tears away to wave again. We can still hear the nervous barking of the dogs aboard the receding schooner. She grows smaller and smaller until nothing but a dot can be seen on the darkening horizon. What lies in store for you, brave men?"

Now the schooner was off on her long voyage and the lighthouse at Archangel sent her its farewell signal: "Happy sailing and success!"-but ashore, what was happening ashore, my God! What sordid squabbling among the ship chandlers who had serviced the schooner, what lawsuits and auctions-some of the supplies and victuals had had to be left behind and were all sold by auction. And the accusations-what didn't they accuse my father of! Within a week of the schooner setting sail he was accused of having failed to insure either himself or his men; of having sailed three weeks later than the conditions of Arctic navigation allowed; of having gone off without a wireless man. He was accused of thoughtlessness in selecting his crew, among whom "there was not a single man who could handle a sail". They made sneering remarks about "this preposterous adventure, which reflected, as in a drop of water, this present-day, pretentious, muddled life of ours."

Within a few days of the *St. Maria's* sailing a violent storm broke out in the Kara Sea and immediately rumours spread that the expedition had been shipwrecked off the coast of Novaya Zemlya. "Who is to blame?" "The Fate of the *St. Maria",* "Where is Tatarinov?"- the first chilling impressions of my childhood came back to me as I read these articles. Mother came quickly into my little room at Ensk with a newspaper in her hand. She was wearing that lovely black rustling dress. She did not see me, though I spoke to her, and I jumped out of bed and ran up to her in my bare feet and nightgown. The floor was cold, but she did not tell me to go back to bed nor did she pick me up from the floor. She just stood by the window with the newspaper in her hand. I tried to

reach up to the window, too, but all I could see was our garden strewn with wet maple leaves, and wet paths and puddles in which the raindrops were still falling. "Mummy, what are you looking at?" She was silent. I asked again. I wanted her to take me in her arms, because her continued silence was frightening me. "Mummy!" I began to cry, and that made her turn round and bend down to pick me up, but something was the matter with her-she sat down on the floor, then lay down and kept quite still, stretched out on the floor in her lovely black, rustling dress. And all of a sudden wild, unreasoning terror seized me and I started to scream. I screamed madly and banged at something with hands and feet. Then I heard Mother's frightened voice, but I went on screaming, unable to stop myself. Afterwards, back in bed I heard Grandma talking to Mother, and Mother saying: "I frightened her."

I pretended to be asleep and did not say anything, because after all she was Mummy and because she was talking and crying in her usual voice.

Only now, on reading these articles, did I realise what made her act that way.

The rumours proved to be false, however, and from Yugorsky Shar Captain Tatarinov telegraphed a message of "hearty greetings and best wishes to all who had made donations to the expedition and to all its well-wishers".

This message was printed in facsimile under an unfamiliar portrait of Father in naval uniform-regulation jacket with white shoulder-straps-an elegant officer with an old-fashioned moustache turned up at the ends.

In sending "best wishes to those who had made donations" he was hoping that their contributions would enable the Committee for the Exploration of Russia's Arctic Territories to support the families of the crew. He wrote about this in his dispatch sent through the Yugorsky Shar Dispatch Service, which was published in the newspaper *Novoye Vremya:*

"I am confident that the Committee will not leave to the mercy of fate the families of those who have dedicated their lives to the common national interests."

Vain hopes! In the issue of the same newspaper for June 27, I read a report of the Committee's meeting: "According to N. A. Tatarinov, the Committee's Secretary, the recent collection has yielded negligible results. Neither have many other methods, such as the organisation of entertainments, etc., produced the hoped-for profits. Therefore, the Committee finds itself unable to render to the families of the crew the proposed assistance of 1,000 rubles."

This phrase about "donations from well-wishers" sounded so queer and grotesque to me. Maybe Mother and I, too, had been living like beggars on this almsgiving?

But what surprises me most in these old newspapers is the way they all declared with one voice, that the schooner *St. Maria* was doomed. Some figured out, pencil in hand, that she would scarcely make Novaya Zemlya. Others believed she would be trapped in the first icefield and would perish somewhat later, after passing Franz Josef Land as a "captive of the Arctic Sea".

That she would fail to navigate the Northern Sea Route, either in one, two or three seasons, nobody had any doubt.

The only exception was a poet who published some verses "To I. L. Tatarinov" in an Archangel newspaper. He was of a different mind:

He is well! God watches over him! The man's astounding energy and risk Have unlocked the Arctic's frozen disk. The icefield crumbles and retreats before him.

I had known a good deal before reading these clippings. In the letter which Sanya had found at Ensk, Father wrote that "most of the sixty dogs had had to be shot at Novaya Zemlya". Vyshimirsky's statement which Sanya had taken down spoke about rotten clothing and damaged chocolate. In the newspaper *Arkhangelsk* I read the letter of a merchant named E. V. Demidov, who stated that "the curing of meat and the preparation of ready-made clothes were not my line of business" and that "in the present instant I acted as an agent. Moreover, as I had a big business of my own to attend to, I naturally could not examine every piece of meat and every fish that went into the barrel. Besides, Captain Tatarinov kept wiring: 'Stop purchases, no money'. And so on. Why start fitting out an expedition when you have no money? If there was anything faulty in such hurried preparations, then those to blame for it should be sought not among the local businessmen, but higher up..."

What I didn't know-nor Sanya either, and I can't understand why Mother never mentioned it-was that "three days before *St. Maria* set sail it was discovered that in the forepeak, below the second deck and well below the waterline, on both sides of the collision-bulkhead there were gashes right through the ribs and shell to the outer sheathing, which made the ship unseaworthy. These holes that bore the telltale traces of an axe and saw, were photographed and measured, the largest being 12 inches wide and 2 ft. 4 inches long, the others a bit smaller. How these holes came to be there is a mystery, one is reminded of the fact that in the event of shipwreck the new owner of the vessel would collect the insurance money."

Of course, no further confirmation is needed that Father is dead and will never come back. His doom had been sealed. He had been sent to his death.

July 18, 1935. Last night, a little after eleven, someone rang at the door. Kiren's mother said it must be the yardman, who had Come to collect the garbage. I ran, pail in hand, to open the door. It wasn't the yardman. It was Romashov. He stepped back quickly when I opened the door and took off his hat.

"It's an urgent matter, and concerns you, that's why I have decided to call, even though it's so late."

He uttered this very gravely, and I believed at once that the matter was urgent and concerned me. I believed because he was so perfectly calm.

"Please come in."

We stood facing each other—he with his hat in his hand, I with my slop-pail. Then I recalled myself and put the pail down in a corner.

"I'm afraid it's not quite convenient," he said politely. "You have visitors, I believe?"

"No."

"Can't we talk out here, on the landing? Or go down to the boulevard. I have something to tell you—"

"Just a moment," I said quickly.

Kiren's mother was calling me. I closed the door and went back.

"Who is it?"

"I'll be back in a minute, Alexandra Dmitrievna," I said hastily. "Or, I tell you what-let Valya come down for me in fifteen minutes' time. I'll be on the boulevard."

She said something, but I did not stop to listen.

It was a cool evening and I had come out as I was. Going downstairs, Romashov said: "You'll catch a cold." He probably wanted to offer me his overcoat—he had even taken it off and was carrying it on his arm, and afterwards, when we sat down, he placed it on the seat-but he could not bring himself to do it. I didn't feel cold, though. I was excited, wondering what his visit could mean.

The boulevard was quiet and deserted.

"Katya, what I wanted to tell you is this," he began cautiously. "I know how important it is for you that the expedition should take place. For you and for—"

He faltered, then went on easily:

"And for Sanya. I don't think that it matters really, I mean that it can change anything, for your uncle, say, who is scared at the prospect. But this concerns you and so it can't be a matter of indifference to me."

He said this very simply.

"I have come to warn you."

"Of what?"

"That the expedition won't take place."

"It isn't true! C. telephoned me."

"They have just decided that it's not worth while," Romashov countered calmly.

"Who has decided? And how do you know?"

He turned away, then faced me, smiling.

"I don't know how to tell you, really. You'll think me a cad again."

"Just as you like."

I was afraid he would get up and go away—he was so calm and self-assured and so unlike the Romashov I had known. But he did not go away.

"Nikolai Antonich told me that the Deputy Chief of the N.S.R. Administration reported on the plan for the expedition and came out against it himself. He doesn't think it's the business of the N.S.R.A. to carry out searches for the lost captains who disappeared over twenty years ago. If you ask me, though-" Romashov hesitated. He must have felt hot, because he took *his* hat off and held it on his knee. "It's not his own opinion."

"Whose opinion is it, then?"

"Nikolai Antonich's," Romashov came back quickly. "He's acquainted with the Deputy Chief, who considers him a great expert on the history of the Arctic. For that matter, who else could they consult concerning the search for Captain Tatarinov if not Nikolai Antonich? It was he who fitted out the expedition and afterwards wrote about it. He's a member of the Geographical Society, and a highly respected one at that."

I was so upset that for the moment I did not ask myself why Nikolai Antonich should be so interested in preventing a search, or what had made Romashov give him away. I felt aggrieved not only for my father's sake, but for Sanya's as well.

"What's his name?"

"Whose?"

"That man who says it's not worth while making a search for lost captains."

Romashov gave the name.

"I'm not going to have this out with Nikolai Antonich, of course," I went on with an effort at restraint, feeling that my nostrils were flaring. "We know where we stand, he and I. But I'll have something to say about him at the N.S.R.A. Sanya had no time to square accounts with him, or else he pitied him-I don't know. But are you sure about this?" I suddenly asked, glancing at Romashov and thinking-why, this is the man who loves me, and whose only thought is how to bring about the ruin of Sanya!

"Why should I tell a lie?" Romashov said impassively. "You'll hear about it. They'll tell you the same thing. Of course, you have to go there and clear everything up. But ... er ... don't say who told you. On second thoughts, tell them - I don't care," he added haughtily. "Only it may get round to Nikolai Antonich and I won't be able to deceive him any more, the way I've done today."

He had betrayed Nikolai Antonich for my sake-that's what he meant. He looked at me and waited.

"I did not ask you to deceive anybody, though there's nothing to be ashamed of in deciding (I nearly said: "for the first time in your life") to act honourably and to help me. I don't know what your present attitude is towards Nikolai Antonich."

"I despise him."

"Well, that's your affair." I rose. "Anyway, thank you Misha. And goodbye."

August 5, 1935. They were not at all sure at the N.S.R.A. that the search should be entrusted to Sanya. He was rather young, and though he had a long record of air service, he had comparatively little experience of work in the Arctic. He had the reputation of being a good, disciplined pilot, but could he cope with such a difficult undertaking, which called for considerable organising ability? By the way, what sort of person was he? Wasn't there something about him in some journal, accusing him of slandering somebody-N. A. Tatarinov, if I'm not mistaken, the well-known expert on the Arctic and the captain's cousin?

I demanded that the editors of the journal publish a disclaimer, and argued that the organisation of a search party of six men was not such a difficult thing. I insisted on the search for Captain Tatarinov being entrusted to the person who had nursed that idea ever since a child. I don't know what will come of it. But somehow I feel certain that the expedition will take place despite everything, and, what's more, that I will go to Severnaya Zemlya together with Sanya. I wrote about this to the Chief of the N.S.R.A. offering my services in the capacity of geologist. Today an answer has arrived from the Personnel Department. Not exactly the answer I had hoped for, though. I was offered a job at one of the Arctic stations, at my own choice, and requested to call at the head office to talk it over. Ah, well, I'll have to start all over again, demanding, proving, insisting.

September 11, 1935. Today I went to see Grandma.

She comes to see me almost every evening. She comes in puffed up and important and talks sedately with Kiren's mother. She doesn't like the idea of me "living out" when "she has such a lovely room" at home.

And she is afraid of somebody called Dora Abramovna who had dropped in twice already "to sniff things out".

"I'm getting old now," she said to me one day with tears in her eyes, "but I've never lived so lonely as I do now."

But yesterday she didn't come, and this morning she phoned to say that her heart was bothering her. When I asked her whether Nikolai Antonich was at home she got angry.

"What a silly question," she said. "Where do you expect him to be? Gadding about counting shacks, like you?"

Then she said he was out, and I quickly got ready and went over to see her.

She was lying on the sofa, covered with her green old coat. Laurel-water drops stood on a little table beside the sofa-the only medicine she believed in—and when I asked her how she was, she dismissed my question with a wave of the hand.

"One of those dumb dogs that can't bark," she snapped. "You can tell at once she lived in a nunnery. Religious. 'Then why are you in service?' I say to her. I gave her the sack."

She had dismissed the domestic help, and that was very bad, because she was a good servant, even though she was religious. At one time Grandma had been pleased that the woman had once been a nun.

"Grandma, what have you done!" I said. "Now you're ill and all alone. I'll have to take you to my place now."

"You will do nothing of the kind! The idea!"

She flatly refused to undress and get into bed, and said that it wasn't her heart at all, it was just that she hadn't cooked a meal the day before and had eaten horse-radish with olive oil-it was the horseradish, it didn't agree with her.

"If you don't go to bed at once, I'm going away."

"Hoity-toity!"

Nevertheless, she undressed, got into bed, groaning, and abruptly fell asleep.

There was always a draught in Mother's room when you opened the window, and so I opened the door in the corridor to air the room. Then I went into my own room. How cheerless and bare it looked, the room I had lived in for so many years! Yet it had been improved since my departure. The bed was covered with Grandma's lace bedspread, the curtains were white as white and even a little stiff with starch, everything was clean and tidy, and the volume of the encyclopaedia, which I must have taken down before I left, remained open at the identical page. I was expected back here...

I thought I caught a glimpse of a figure hurrying down the corridor when I came out of the room.

I couldn't imagine my sick grandmother running about the corridor in her green velvet coat, but somebody *had* been running there, and in a green coat, too. Yet it *was* Grandma, because, though I found her in bed when I went back to her room, she looked as if she had just flopped into it and hadn't had time to draw up the blanket.

It was very funny to see how hard she was pretending. She even blinked sleepily to show that she had just come awake and that running down the corridor was farthest from her thoughts. Obviously, she had been spying on me to see whether I was homesick, hoping I would come back.

"Have you had the doctor, Grandma?" I asked, when she had finally stopped rubbing her eyes and yawning loudly.

She hadn't. She didn't want any doctor.

"Nonsense! I'm going to call him at once."

But Grandma went up in the air at this and said that if I called the doctor she would dress immediately and go off to Maria Nikitichna-the neighbour.

So far not a word had been said about Nikolai Antonich. But when Grandma put on a dead-pan expression, I knew it was coming.

"The whole house is going to pieces," she began with a sigh. "Your deserting him has hit him badly! He's lost his grip on things, doesn't care about anything. Doesn't care whether he eats or not."

"He" meant Nikolai Antonich.

"And he writes and writes—day and night," Grandma went on. "First thing in the morning, soon as he's had his tea, he wraps my shawl round him and sits down at Ms desk. 'This, Nina Kapitonovna, will be my lifework,' he says. 'As to whether I'm guilty or not, my friends and enemies will now judge for themselves.' And he's got so thin. Absent-minded, too," Grandma communicated in a whisper. "The other day he sat at the table in his hat. I think he's going mad."

At that moment the front door closed softly and someone came into the hall. I looked at Grandma, who avoided my eyes, and I realised that it was Nikolai Antonich.

"I must be going now. Grandma."

He came in, after a light tap on the door and without waiting for an answer.

I turned round and nodded, pleased to find that I could do it with such careless, even audacious ease.

"How are you, Katya?"

"Not bad, thank you."

Oddly enough, I saw him now just as a pale, ageing man with short arms and stubby fingers, which he kept nervously twiddling and trying to tuck away all the time, now inside his collar, now into his waistcoat pockets, as if to hide them. He now resembled an old actor. I had known him once-ages ago. But now the sight of his pallid face, *his* scraggy neck and the hands, which shook so visibly when he stretched them out to pull up an armchair for himself left me unmoved.

The first awkward minute passed with him asking me in a jocular tone whether my map was right and I hadn't mixed up the Zimmerdag suite with the Asha suite-an illusion to a mistake I had once made in my university days—and I started to take my leave again.

"Goodbye, Grandma."

"I can go away," Nikolai Antonich said quietly.

He sat in an armchair, hunched up, regarding me steadily with a kindly eye. That was how he looked sometimes, when we had had long talks together-after Mother's death. But now that was merely a distant memory for me.

"If you're in a hurry, we can talk some other time," he said.

"Honestly, Grandma, I have an appointment," I said to my grandmother, who was holding me tightly by the sleeve.

"No you haven't. What d'you mean? He's your uncle."

"Come, come, Nina Kapitonovna," Nikolai Antonich interposed good-naturedly. "What difference does it make whether I'm her uncle or not. Obviously, you don't want to hear what I have to say, Katya?"

"I don't."

"Pig-headed, that's what she is!" Grandmother said vehemently.

I laughed.

"I cannot talk to you either about how painful your going away without even saying goodbye was to me," Nikolai Antonich went on hurriedly in the same simple kindly manner, "or about how you were both misled into believing that poor sick old man, who had only recently been discharged from a mental hospital."

He looked at me over the top of his glasses. A mental hospital! Another lie. One lie more or less—I did not care now. The only thing that worried me was the thought that this might affect Sanya in some disagreeable way.

"My God! The things that poor, muddled brain of his made up! That I had ruined him by means of some bills of exchange, and that it was because of me that the expedition had found itself so badly equipped—why, what do you think? Because I wanted to destroy Ivan!"

Nikolai Antonich laughed heartily.

"Out of jealousy! My God! I loved your mother and out of jealousy I wanted to destroy Ivan!"

He laughed again, then suddenly took off his glasses and began wiping away the tears.

"Yes, I loved her," he muttered, weeping, "and. God knows, everything could have been different. Even if I were guilty, I have had my punishment from her. She punished me like I never thought I could be."

I listened to. him as in a dream, with a sense of having seen and heard all this before—that flushed bald head with its sparse hairs, the same words uttered with the same expression, and that unpleasant feeling which the sight of a weeping old man rouses in you.

"Well?" Grandma demanded sternly.

"Grandma!" I said, thrilled at the anger that flared up in me, "after all, I'm not a little girl any longer, and I can do as I please, I believe. I don't want to live here any more-is that clear? I'm getting married. I'll probably live in the Far North with my husband, who has nothing to do here because he's an Arctic pilot. As for Nikolai Antonich, I've seen him crying so many times, I'm fed up. All I can say is that if he had not been guilty he would hardly have messed about with this affair all *his* life. He would hardly bother to get the N.S.R.A. to drop the idea of Sanya's expedition."

By this time, I daresay, I was feeling a bit deflated, because Grandma was looking at me in a frightened way, and, I believe, furtively crossing herself. Nikolai Antonich's cheek was twitching. He said nothing,

"And leave me alone!" I flung out. "Leave me alone!"

November 19, 1935. The expedition has been approved! Professor V., the well-known Arctic scientist, wrote an article in which he expressed the conviction that, judging by the diaries of Navigator Klimov, "the materials collected by the Tatarinov expedition, if found, could contribute to our present knowledge of the Arctic".

This idea, even to me, sounded rather daring. Unexpectedly, though, it received confirmation and it was this that tipped the scale in favour of

Sanya's plan. After studying the chart of the *St. Maria's* drift between October 1912 and April 1914, Professor V. expressed the opinion that there must be as yet undiscovered land at latitude 78°02'and longitude 64°. And this hypothetical land, which V. had discovered without moving from his study, was actually found during the 1935 navigation season. True, it wasn't much of a place, just a small island lost amidst the creeping ice and presenting a dismal picture, but, be that as it may, this meant one more blank space filled in on the map of the Soviet Arctic, and this had been done with the aid of the chart showing the drift of the *St. Maria.*

I don't know what other arguments, if any were needed to put Sanya's plan through, but the fact remains that "a search party attached to an expedition into the high latitudes for the study of Severnaya Zemlya" was included in the plan for next year's navigation season. Sanya was to come to Leningrad in the spring, and we arranged to meet there, in Leningrad, where I had never been before.

May 4, 1936. What thoughts and fancies thronged in my mind yesterday morning as my train drew into Leningrad, where, the next morning, that is today. May 4th I was to meet Sanya! Though the carriage was a rattling, creaking fair—it must have been an old one— I slept all night like a top, and when I woke up, I started daydreaming. How good it was to lie and dream, listening to the monotonous rumble of the wheels and the sleepy breathing of my fellow passengers! I had a feeling that all my dreams would come true, even that my father was alive and that we would find him and all come back together. It was impossible of course. But there was such peace and serenity in my heart that I could not help dwelling on the thought. In my heart, as it were, I commanded that we find him-and now, there he stood, grey-headed and erect, and he had to be made to go to sleep, otherwise he would go mad with excitement and joy.

The men who shared the compartment with me were by this time out in the corridor, smoking. I suppose they were waiting for me to get dressed and come out, but I was still lying there, daydreaming.

We had arranged that Sanya's sister (whom I always called Sasha in my letters to distinguish her from my Sanya) was to meet me at the railway station—she, "or Pyotr, if I am unwell", she had written. She had several times made passing mention of her indisposition, but her letters were so cheerful, with little drawings in them, that I attached no importance to these remarks. I had an inkling of what it was about, though. In one of her letters Pyotr was depicted with a paint brush in one hand and an infant in the other, the two of them being remarkably alike.

Everybody had their hats and coats on now, and my fellow travellers helped to get my suitcase down from the rack. It was rather heavy, because I had taken with me everything I possessed, even several interesting specimens of rock. I was so excited. Leningrad! Suddenly, between the passengers' heads, the platform came into view, and I began looking out for the Skovorodnikovs. But the platform slid past and there was no sign of them. Then I recollected with annoyance that I had not wired them the number of my carriage.

A porter lugged my case out and we stood together on the platform until everybody had walked past. The Skovorodnikovs were not there.

Sasha in one of her letters had described in detail, even giving a sketch, how to get to their place in Karl Liebknecht Prospekt. But I got it all mixed up and coming out into Nevsky Prospekt I asked a polite Leningrader in a pince-nez: "Can you please tell me how to get to Nevsky Prospekt?"

It was a disgraceful blunder, and I have never told a living soul about it.

Then I got into a tram crush, and the only thing I noticed was that the streets were rather empty compared with Moscow. So was the one I got off at and down which I dragged my suitcase. And there was house No. 79. "Berenstein, Photographic Artist". This was the place.

I was standing on the second floor landing, rubbing my fingers, which were numb from carrying that accursed suitcase, when the front door banged downstairs and a lanky figure in a mackintosh with his cap in his hand dashed past me, taking the steps two at a time.

"Pyotr!" I cried.

He was worlds away at the moment from any thought of me, for he stopped, glanced at me, and, finding nothing of interest in me, made a movement to run on. Some dim recollection, however, made him pause.

"Don't you recognise me?"

"Why, of course I do! Katya, I'm coming from the hospital," he said in a tone of despair. "Sasha was taken in last night."

"No, really?"

"Yes. Come along in. That's why we couldn't come to meet you."

"What's the matter with her?"

"Didn't she write you?"

"No."

"Come along, I'll tell you all about it."

Evidently the family of the photographic artist Berenstein took a great interest in the affairs of Sasha and Pyotr, for a slight, smartly dressed woman met Pyotr in the hall and inquired with some agitation: "Well, how is she?"

He said he knew nothing, he had not been allowed to go in, but at that moment another woman, just as slight and elegant, came running out and asked agitatedly: "Well, how is she?"

And Pyotr had to explain to her again that he knew nothing and had not been allowed to go in.

Sasha was expecting a child, that is why they had taken her to the hospital.

"Why are you so upset, Pyotr? I'm sure everything will be fine."

We were alone in his room and he was sitting opposite me hunched up in an armchair. His face looked bleak and he clenched his teeth as if in pain when I said that everything would be fine.

"You don't know. She's very ill, she has the flu and she's coughing. She said it would be all right too."

He introduced me to the family of the photographic artist—to his little grey-haired, graceful wife and her as graceful little grey-haired sister. The head of the family had moved to Moscow, for some reason, but they showed me his portrait, that of a well-favoured man with a fine head of hair wearing a velvet jacket-your true photographic artist, perhaps more of an artist than a photographer.

I went to sleep in Sasha's bed, but Pyotr said he did not feel sleepy and settled down with a book by the telephone. The nurse at the

hospital phoned regularly every half hour. I fell asleep after one of these calls, but only for a minute I believe, because someone started knocking on the wall with short, sharp raps, and I jumped up, not knowing where I was and what was happening. There was a light in the passage and voices sounded there, as of several people talking loudly all together. The next moment Pyotr dashed into the room, looking like some elongated monster, and started a wild dance.

Then he leaned over the table and began to take something off the wall.

"Pyotr, what is it? What's happened?"

"A boy!" he yelled. "A boy!"

All kinds of things started dropping around as he tried to take from the wall a large portrait in a heavy frame. First he knelt on the table, then stood on it, and tried to get between the wall and the picture.

"And Sasha? How's Sasha? You're crazy! Why are you taking that picture down?"

"I promised to give it to Mrs Berenstein if everything went well."

He clambered down from the table, kissed me and burst into tears.

And this morning I met Sanya.

When the train appeared a ripple of excitement ran down the platform. Though there were not many people there, I stood well back from them so that he could easily spot me. I was calm, I believe. Only it seemed to me that everything was happening very slowly—the train drew slowly alongside the platform, and the first passengers slowly stepped down and came towards me ever so slowly. They came and came, but there was no sign of Sanya, and my heart sank. He had not arrived.

"Katya!"

I turned and saw him standing by the first carriage. I ran to him, feeling everything within me quivering with excitement and happiness.

We, too, walked very slowly down the platform, stopping every minute to look at each other. I don't remember what we talked about those first few minutes. Sanya was asking me hurried questions and I was answering almost without hearing myself.

We went to Astoria, as Sanya said it was more convenient for him to stay at a hotel, and from there we phoned Pyotr. He let out a wild whoop when I told him that Sanya was standing beside me and trying to snatch the receiver out of my hand. They roared at each other disjointedly: "Hey! How goes it, old chap, eh?" In the end they came to an understanding-Sanya was to go to the clinic and together they would try to get in to see Sasha. "And me?" Sanya took me in his arms.

"From now on, where I go, you go!" he said. "And that's that!" They did not let us see Sasha, of course, but he sent her a note and received her reply, begging us to keep Pyotr from going on the rampage.

Sanya had to go to the Arctic Institute, and I accompanied him there, not only because I wanted to be with him, but because it was time, after all, that we discussed the business that had brought us both to Leningrad. My last letters had not reached him and he had not heard the news about the *Pakhtusov,* which—it had just been decided— would go through Matochkin Strait, and then, rounding Severnaya Zemlya, make for the Lyashkov Islands.

"Well, we'll have more time, that's all," Sanya said. "It's the time factor that worries me most."

We talked about the make-up of the search party and he said that he had recommended a radio man from Dikson, Doctor Ivan Ivanovich and his mechanic Luri, about whom he had often written to me from Zapolarie.

"The radio man's a splendid chap. Do you know who he is?" "No."

"Korzinkin," Sanya solemnly announced. "None other." I had to confess that I had never heard the name before, and Sanya explained that Korzinkin was one of the two Russians who had gone with Amundsen to the South Pole, and that Amundsen mentions him in his book.

"Ripping, eh? I'll be the fifth. And you the sixth. I suggested you as being the daughter."

"Oh, you did? I thought I was entitled to join the expedition not merely as the daughter of Captain Tatarinov. Is that what you wrote-'profession—daughter'?" Sanya was taken aback. "I don't see that it matters," he muttered. "D'you think it was silly?"

"Very silly."

"Otherwise it would look as if I was trying to get my wife in. Rather awkward."

"I did not ask you to try to get me in, Sanya," I said composedly. "Daughter, wife! I'm a niece and granddaughter, too. I'm an old geologist, Sanya, and I asked the Chief of the N.S.R.A. to include me in the expedition as a geologist, and not as your wife. By the way, I'm not your wife yet, and if you're going to carry on in this silly way I'll go and marry someone else. We haven't been to the registrar's yet, have we?"

I even began to feel sorry for him as he stood there blinking, laughing awkwardly, taking off his cap and wiping his forehead with his hand.

"I'm sorry, Katya, honestly!" he muttered.

I gave him a quick kiss, though we happened to be standing in the courtyard facing the building of the Arctic Institute, and said: "Good luck."

He promised to ring me at six or drop in at Pyotr's place, if he could manage it.

May 7, 1936. He returned that day not at six but at eleven, and not to Pyotr's but to the Astoria and phoned demanding that we come down straight away and have supper with him, as he had had nothing to eat and was as hungry as a wolf, and wanted company.

But Pyotr felt done up after an anxious day, and besides, he had had some vodka to buck him up and was now lying on the sofa, blinking sleepily, and looking like Punch with that fantastic nose of his and ungainly legs and arms.

I remember the dates of all my meetings with Sanya and of our letters too. We met in the garden in Triumfalnaya Square on April 2 and outside the Bolshoi Theatre on June 13. And that evening on May 4, when he rang me up on his return from the Arctic Institute and I went over to see him-that day, too, I shall remember as long as I live.

We have known each other since childhood and I thought that I knew him better by now than he perhaps knew himself. But never before had I seen him the way he was that evening. When we were having supper I even told him as much.

His plan had been fully approved and he had received lots of compliments. He had met Professor V., the man who had discovered the island by tracing the drift of the *St. Maria,* and the Professor had been very nice to him. And he was in Leningrad, that great, beautiful city,

which he had loved ever since his flying school days—in Leningrad after the silences of the Arctic! Everything was fine!

This happiness of his, this success, showed so clearly in his face, in his every gesture, even in the way he ate. His eyes shone, he sat erect and at the same time at his ease. If I were not already in love with him I would certainly have fallen in love with him that evening.

We sat eating and drinking for God knows how long, then we went for a walk after I had mentioned that I hadn't yet seen the sights of Leningrad. Sanya was all eagerness to show me himself "what kind of a city this was".

It was past two, the darkest hour of the night, but when we came out of the Astoria it was so light that I purposely stopped in Gogol Street to read a newspaper in one of the wall stands.

Leningrad of the Midnight Sun! But Sanya said these white nights were nothing new to him and the one good thing about the Leningrad brand was that it did not last six months.

It grew cold and I was lightly clad, so we both wrapped ourselves in Sanya's raincoat and sat for a long time in utter silence with our arms round each other.

We were sitting on a semi-circular granite seat on the Neva embankment, and somewhere down below a wave slapped gently against the stone facing.

Then we went back to the Astoria and made coffee in Sanya's room. Sanya always carried a coffee-pot and spirit lamp about with him when travelling.

"Doesn't it frighten you to feel so happy?" he said, taking me in his arms. "Your heart's going pit-a-pat! So's mine, you just listen."

He took my hand and placed it over *his* heart.

"We're terribly excited-isn't it funny?"

He was saying something, without hearing what he was saying, and *his* voice grew strangely deep with emotion...

We did not go to the Skovorodnikovs until about one o'clock in the afternoon. One of the elegant little old ladies opened the door and said that Pyotr was not at home.

"He has gone to the Clinic."

"So early?"

"Yes."

She looked worried.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing. He telephoned there and they told him that Alexandra was slightly worse."

May 21, 1936. Then began days which I shall probably remember all my life with horror and impotent despair. We went to the Schroder Clinic three times a day and stood for a long time in front of the board which displayed the patients' temperature charts: "Skovorodnikova-98;99,2;101;103.8".

Then the temperature dropped sharply and rose again after several hours to as high as 104.9. I suspected that this was not a case of pneumonia, as we had been told at the Clinic, and I called on the professor at his flat. But he confirmed the diagnosis-the area of inflammation could be clearly detected by auscultation, and there were several areas in both lungs.

I hardly saw Sanya those days. He rang me up sometimes at night and once I dropped in to see him at the Institute, in the little office set apart for the organisation of the search party. He was sitting at a desk piled with weapons, cameras, mittens and fur stockings. A man with a grave whiskered face, wearing a leather coat, was assembling a double-barrelled gun on his desk and swearing because the barrels would not fit into the stock.

"Well, how is she? Did you see her? What do the doctors say?"

The telephone kept ringing every minute. Annoyed, he lifted the receiver and threw it down on the desk.

"Same as before," I answered.

"And the temperature?"

"This morning it was a hundred and five."

"Hell! Isn't there anything they can do?"

His face looked drawn, anxious and tired, and he was quite unlike himself, especially the self he was on the day of his arrival.

I had seldom had occasion to nurse sick people, especially people as ill as Sasha was, but having been given permission to watch at her bedside, I learned to do it. It was hard, because Sasha practically never slept, and if she did fall asleep she would wake up on the instant and one had to listen to her breathing all the time.

There were days when she rallied, and very strongly too. I remember one such day, the fourth day of my stay at the hospital. She had slept well during the night and woke up in the morning saying she was hungry. She drank some tea with milk and ate an egg, and when we were tucking her in to air the ward she suddenly said: "Katya, darling, have you been with me all the time? And sleeping here too?"

My face must have given me away, because she showed surprise.

"Have I been as ill as that?"

"Darling, we're going to open the window. You just lie still and keep quiet. You were ill and now you are getting better and everything will be fine."

She complied without demur, and only kept my hand in hers for a little while when I started to wipe her face and hands with toilet vinegar. Then they brought the baby and we watched him while he fed, his eyes wide open with such a serious, silly expression.

"He looks like him, doesn't he?" Sasha said from behind her mask.

She was pleased that the boy resembled Pyotr. As a matter of fact he did have that longish sort of profile. He had a profile already, though he was only ten days old.

Towards the evening Sasha felt slightly worse, but it did not worry me very much, because she usually got worse towards the evening. I sat reading, holding the book close under the lamp which stood on the bedside table with a kerchief thrown over the shade to keep the light out of Sasha's eyes. Sanya had sent me several books the day before and I was reading Stefansson's *The Friendly Arctic.*

My candidature as a member of the-expedition had been finally approved, precisely as a geologist, and the books *which* Sanya had sent me were basic and had to be read.

It must have been round about three when I got up to listen to Sasha's breathing and saw that she was lying with her eyes open. "What is it, darling?"

She was silent. Then, quietly, she said: "Katya, I'm dying." "You're getting better. Today you are much better." "It wouldn't be so terrible if it weren't for the baby." Her eyes were full of tears and she tried to turn her head to wipe them on the pillow.
I dried her eyes and kissed her. Her forehead was very hot. The nurse came in and I sent her to fetch the oxygen pad How can I describe the horror which began that night! What a lot you learn about a person when he dies! Listening to the speeches at the memorial service in the Academy of Arts I thought that Sasha had not had half as many nice things said about her during her life as those they were saying now after her death.

The coffin stood on a dais, and there were lots of flowers, so many that her pale face could hardly be seen amidst them. People made speeches, saying what "a fine artist" and "a fine person" she had been and that "sudden death had torn the thread of a noble life" and so on. And how feeble all those speeches were before the dead, austere face lying in that coffin!

Pyotr was all right, though his pale, impassive face struck me as odd. He seemed to be waiting patiently for this whole long procedure to end at last and then Sasha would be with him again and everything would be fine once more. Old Skovorodnikov, who had arrived the day before to attend the funeral, stood behind him, tears rolling down his cheeks into his neat grey moustache. Then a mist rose before my eyes again and I have no further memory of how the ceremony ended.

May 28, 1936. Once in conversation with me, C. had used the expression "getting the North into your blood". And only now, while helping Sanya to fit out the search party,, did I get to know what it really meant. Not a day passes without Sanya being visited by some persons who had contracted that malady. One of them is P., an old artist, a friend and companion of Sedov, who had warmly acclaimed Sanya's article in *Pravda* and subsequently published his own reminiscences of how the *St. Phocas,* on her way back to the mainland, had picked up Navigation officer Klimov at Cape Flora.

Boys come, asking Sanya to take them on as stokers, cooks-any old job.
Ambitious men come, seeking easy paths to honour and fame; also disinterested dreamers, to whom the Arctic is a sort of wonderland, full of magic and glamour.

And yesterday, when I fell asleep, waiting for Sanya, curled up in an armchair, a man came to see Sanya. A naval man—I couldn't say what rank-a bluff, hearty man with a Cossack's forelock and dark mocking eyes. Whether he had come alone or with Sanya, I couldn't say, but waking up in the middle of the night I found them engaged in earnest conversation and quickly closed my eyes, pretending to be asleep. It was pleasant to listen and doze, or pretend that you were dozing—you didn't have to introduce yourself, or do your hair, or change.

"It's all very well to say that a search for Captain Tatarinov has nothing in common with the basic tasks of the N.S.R.A. That's nonsense, of course. You only have to remember the search for Franklin. Searching for people is a jolly good thing—it helps to improve the map. But I'm talking of a different thing."

Pencil in hand, he began figuring out the mineral resources of the Kola Peninsula. Now here I was on my own ground. But the nocturnal visitor counted all these peaceful minerals as "strategic raw material" needed in the event of war, and mentally I started arguing with him, convinced as I was that there would be no war.

"I assure you," the man said, "that Captain Tatarinov understood perfectly well that at the back of every Arctic expedition there must be some military purpose."

"Of course he did," I mentally retorted in that queer state of drowsiness when you can think and speak, which is the same as not speaking and not thinking. "But there won't be any war!"

"It is high time we set up defensive bases all along the route of our convoys. I'd like to see a good long-range battery on Novaya Zemlya, say..."

He went on talking and talking, and all of a sudden, from this quiet hotel room, where I lay curled in an armchair and where Sanya had just covered the lamp with the end of tablecloth to keep the light out of my eyes, I was transported to some strange town half-destroyed by fire. Here, too, it was quiet, but with a tense, deathly hush. Everyone was waiting for something to happen, talking in whispers, and one had to go down into a basement, groping for the damp walls in the dark. I didn't go. I was standing on the front steps of a dark, empty wooden house with the clear mysterious sky stretching above me. Where was he now? The plane was hurtling through this fearful starlit void, its engine stuttering, its ice-laden wings growing heavier every moment. It was the decree of fate, nothing could alter it. The sound of the engine grew muffled, the machine quivered, and the call-signs from the distant stations could no longer be heard...

"Quite right, an old story," the naval man suddenly said in a loud voice and I woke up with a sigh of relief. It was all nonsense, of course. In a day or two we would both be leaving for the North, and there he stood before me, my own Sanya, clever, tired, dear Sanya, whom I loved and from whom I would now never be parted again.

"But the N.S.R.A. is not interested in history. Dammit, they ought to read the Large Soviet Encyclopaedia! By the way, it gives an interesting quotation from Mendeleyev. Listen, I copied it out. A splendid quotation!"

And burring his r's in a childlike manner, he read out the famous words of Mendeleyev, which I had first come across somewhere among my father's papers: "If only a tenth of what we lost at Tsushima had been spent on reaching the Pole, our squadron would probably have got to Vladivostok without passing through either the North Sea or Tsushima."

Sitting curled up in the armchair, pretending to be asleep, lazily examining through half-lowered eyelids our unexpected nocturnal visitor with his ardent manner, his childlike burring speech and that amusing Cossack's forelock of his, I was glad that my dream had been only a dream, that the whole thing was just nonsense which you could dismiss from your mind...

May 29, 1936. A nurse had been found at last for Pyotr junior, a very good nurse with references, stout, clean, with forty years' experience-"a regular professor of a nurse", as the delighted Berensteins informed me. She arrived, followed by the yardman dragging in a large old-fashioned

trunk, from which the nurse promptly extracted a pinafore and cap and an ancient photograph dimly portraying the nurse's parents and herself as a seven-year-old wearing a petrified expression.

June 2, 1936. I shall remember that night as long as I live-the last night before our departure. In the evening I had run over to see the baby. He had just had his bath and was sleeping, and the nurse, in cap and splendid white pinafore, was sitting on her trunk and knitting.

"I've nursed Counts in my day," she said proudly in answer to my last-minute requests and admonitions.

A chill struck my heart at the thought of all the silly things such a learned nurse was capable of, but the sight of the little boy reassured me. He lay there so clean and white, and the whole place was spick and span.

Pyotr and the Berensteins were going to see us off at the station.

Sanya was asleep when I got back. Some money was lying about on the carpet; I picked it up and began to read Sanya's long list of things which had to be attended to the next day.

Though it was already night, the room was light, Sanya had forgotten to draw the curtains. I took off my dress, had a wash and got into a dressing gown. My cheeks were burning, and I didn't feel a bit sleepy. On the contrary, I wished Sanya would wake up.

The telephone rang and I picked up the receiver.

"He's asleep."

"Has he been asleep long?"

"No." "Oh, all right, don't wake him."

Catch me waking him! It was V., I recognised his voice. It must have been something important to make him phone at night. Anyway, it was a good thing I had not woken Sanya. He slept soundly, on the sofa, in his clothes, and must have been having disturbing dreams. A shadow crossed his face and his lips compressed.

Oh, how I wanted to wake him up! I walked up and down the room, touching my hot cheeks. It was a hotel room, and tomorrow other people would be in it. It was like a thousand other such rooms:
a sofa covered with light-blue rep, window blinds, a small desk with a sheet of glass on top-but all the same it was our first home and I wanted to retain it in my memory always.

From behind the partition came the sound of a violin. It had been playing for a long time, but I became aware of it only now. The player was that slim red-haired boy, a well-known violinist, who had been pointed out to me in the lobby. I knew he was living in the next room to ours.

He was playing something altogether different in mood from what I was thinking at the moment-not that strange, happy feeling about Sanya being my husband and I his wife, but our former young meetings, as though he saw us at the school ball, when Sanya had kissed me for the first time.

"Youth continues," played the red-haired boy, whom I had thought so ugly. "After sorrow comes joy, after parting, reunion. Do you remember commanding, in your heart, that you find him, and now there he stands, grey-headed, erect, and the joy and excitement of it are enough to drive one mad. Tomorrow you start out, and everything will be as you have commanded. Everything will be fine, because the fairy-tales we believe in still come true on this earth."

I lay down on the carpeted floor, listening and weeping, half-ashamed of myself for those foolish tears. But I hadn't cried for so long, and had always taken pains to pretend that I could not.

I woke Sanya at six o'clock and told him that V. had phoned during the night.

"You're not angry, are you?"

"What about?"

He sat up on the sofa and looked at me sleepily first with one eye, then with the other.

"At my not waking you."

"I'm furious," he said, and laughed. "You look younger. Yesterday V. asked how old you were, and I told him eighteen."

He kissed me, then ran into the bathroom, came out in bathing trunks and started to do his exercises. He had made me do morning exercises, too, but I did them by fits and starts, whereas he did them regularly, even twice a day-morning and evening.

Still wet, wiping his chest with a rough towel, he went over to the telephone and lifted the receiver, though I said it was too early to phone V. I was doing something, lighting the spirit-lamp, I believe, to make coffee. Sanya asked for V. Then, in a queer voice, he said, "What?" I turned to see the towel slip from his shoulder to the floor without him making any attempt to pick it up. He stood there, very straight, with the blood ebbing from his face.

"All right, I'll send an express telegram," he said and hung up.

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing. Some nonsense or other," Sanya said slowly, picking up the towel. "V. got a wire last night saying that the search party was off. I've been ordered to report to Moscow immediately, at Civil Air Fleet Headquarters, to take up a new appointment."

August 19, 1936. Sanya used to say that life was always like that: everything goes well, then suddenly a sharp turn sends you into "Barrels" and "Immelmanns". This time, though, you could say that the machine had gone into a spin.

"It's all over, Katya," he said savagely when he had returned from V. "The Arctic, expeditions, the *St. Maria*—\ don't want to hear anything more about them. It's all fairy-tales for children, time we forgot them."

And I promised to be with him in forgetting those "fairy-tales", though I was sure that he never would forget them.

I still had a slender hope that Sanya would succeed in Moscow in getting the order revoked. But the telegram I got from him, sent not from Moscow but from somewhere on the way to Saratov, killed that hope. The very appointment which he had received put the seal, as it were, to the cancellation of the expedition. He had been transferred to the Agricultural Aviation Service, known as the S.P.A.— Special Purpose Aviation—and his job now was to sow wheat and spray reservoirs. "Very well, I'll be what they take me for," he wrote in his first letter from some farm, where he had been spending over a week now "co-ordinating and fixing" things with the local authorities. "To hell with illusions, for they *were* illusions really! C. was right after all-if a thing's worth doing at all, do it well. Don't imagine that I've thrown my hand in. The future is still ours."

"Let's be grateful for that old story," he wrote in another letter, "if only because it helped us to find and love each other. I am confident, though, that very soon these old private reckonings will prove important not only to us."

Nothing seemed to be working out the way I had thought and dreamt. I had come to Leningrad for two or three weeks to meet Sanya and follow him wherever he might go, and now he was far away from me again. I now found myself with a family—Pyotr junior, Pyotr senior and Nanny, who had to be taken care of, and it was I who had to do all the thinking.

I continued my studies of Arctic geology, though I had promised Sanya to think no more of the North. Being hard up for money, I took up some dreary work at the Geological Institute.

Ordinarily, I would probably have taken it badly, cursed myself, and thought about myself a thousand times more than need be. But a curious inward composure had suddenly taken possession of me. It was as though, together with the "fairy-tales", I had seen the last of my vanity, my pride, my sense of personal grievance at things not having turned out the way I so passionately wanted them to. "It can't be helped, dearest!" I answered Sanya when he blamed himself in one of his letters for having dragged me out to Leningrad and abandoned me there, and with a whole family on my hands into the bargain. "As our old judge says, you can't have things your own way in life."

I wrote to him often, long letters about our "learned" Nanny, about how quick little Pyotr was changing, about how Pyotr senior all of a sudden had thrown himself eagerly into his work and his design for a Pushkin monument was going splendidly.

But not a word did I write about how, one day, while shopping at a grocery store in October 25th Prospekt, I saw through the window a familiar figure in a grey overcoat and soft hat, the very hat which had been bought for my benefit and which sat so awkwardly on the big square head.

It was getting dark, and I may have been mistaken. No, it was Romashov all right. Aloof, pale, leaning slightly forward, he slowly walked past the shop window and was lost in the crowd.



PART SEVEN

FROM THE DIARY OF KATYA TATARINOVA

SEPARATION

September 2, 1941. I once read some verses in which the years were compared to lanterns hanging "on the slender thread of time drawn through the mind". Some of these lanterns burn with a bright, beautiful light, others flicker smokily in the darkness.

We live in the Crimea and in the Far East. I am the wife of an airman and I have many new acquaintances, all airmen's wives, in the Crimea and the Far East. Like them, I worry when new aircraft are received in the detachment. Like them, I keep telephoning detachment headquarters, to the annoyance of the duty-officer, whenever Sanya goes aloft and doesn't come back in time. Like them, I am sure that I shall never get used to my husband's job, and like them, end up by getting used to it. Almost impossible though it is, I have not given up my geology. My old professor, who still calls me "dear child", assures me that had I not got married, and to an airman at that, I should long ago have won my M. Sc. degree. She went back on these words when, in the late autumn of 1937, I came back to Moscow from the Far East with a new piece of research done together with Sanya. Aeromagnetic prospecting, the subject was. Searching for iron-ore deposits from an airplane.

We are in a sleeping-car compartment of the Vladivostok-Moscow express. It is almost unbelievable-we have actually been together under the same roof for ten whole days, without parting day or night. We have breakfast, dinner and supper at the same table. We see each other in the daytime-there are said to be women who do not find this strange.

"Sanya, now I know what you are."

"What am I?"

"You're a traveller."

"Yes, a sky chauffeur-Vladivostok-Irkutsk, take-off from Primorsky Airport, seven forty-four."

"That doesn't mean anything. You don't get a chance. All the same you're a traveller by vocation, it's your grand passion. You know, it has always seemed to me that every person has a characteristic age of his own. One person is born forty, while another remains a boy of nineteen all his life. C. is like that, and so are you. Lots of airmen, in fact. Especially those who go in for ocean hops."

"You think I'm one of them?"

"Yes. You won't throw me over when you're hopped across, will you?"

"No. But they'll call me back mid-way."

I said nothing. "They'll call me back"—now that was quite a different story. A story of how my father's life, which Sanya had pieced together from fragments scattered between Ensk and Taimyr, had fallen into alien hands. The portraits of Captain Tatarinov hang in the Geographical Society and the Arctic Institute. Poets dedicate verses to him, most of them very poor ones. The Soviet Encyclopaedia has a big article about him signed with the modest initials N.A.T. His voyage is now history, the history of Russia's conquest of the Arctic, along with names like Sedov, Rusanov and Toll.

And the higher this name rises, the more often does one hear it uttered alongside that of his cousin, the distinguished Arctic scientist, who gave his whole fortune to organise the expedition of the *St. Maria* and devoted his whole life to the biography of that great man.

Nikolai Antonich's admirable work has received appreciative recognition. His book *Amid the Icy Wastes* is reprinted every year in editions designed both for children and adults. The newspapers carry reports of various scientific councils which he chairs. At these councils he delivers speeches, in which I find traces of the old dispute which ended that day and hour when a woman with a very white face was carried out into a cold stone yard and taken away from home for ever. But that dispute had not ended yet, no! It is not for nothing that that worthy scientist never tires of repeating in his books that the people responsible for Captain Tatarinov's death were the tradesmen, notably one named von Vyshimirsky. It is not for nothing that this worthy scientist uses arguments with which he had once tried to give the lie to the words of a schoolboy who had discovered his secret.

Now he is silent, that schoolboy. But the future is still ours.

He is silent, and works tirelessly day and night. On the Volga he sprays reservoirs. He carries the mail between Irkutsk and Vladivostok and is happy when he succeeds in delivering Moscow newspapers to Vladivostok within forty-eight hours. He is promoted to Pilot, Second Class, and it is I, not he, who feels outraged when, after he had asked-for the nth time—to be sent to the North, he receives by way of reply a reappointment as sky chauffeur, this time between Simferopol and Moscow. What is this secret shadow that keeps falling across his path? I don't know. Nor does he.

He works and is appreciated, but I alone realise how tired he is of the monotony of those dreary flights, each one resembling the other like a thousand brothers...

In the winter of 1937 Sanya is transferred to Leningrad. We stay with the Berensteins, and all would be well but for one thing: I wake up in the night to find Sanya lying with his eyes wide open...

We stand in the Berensteins' tiny hallway among some old winter coats and mantles. We stand there in silence. The last quarter of an hour before another parting. He is going away in mufti, looking so unfamiliar in that fashionable coat with the wide shoulders and the soft hat.

"Is that you, Sanya? "

"Maybe it isn't?"

He laughs.

"Let's consider that it isn't me. You are crying?"

"No. Take care of yourself, darling."

He says, "I'll be back" and some other tender, confused words. I don't remember what I said, all I remember is asking him not to forget his parachute. He doesn't always carry one.

Where is he going? To the Far East, he says. Why in mufti? Why, when I ask him about this assignment, does he take Ms time answering? Why, when he gets a phone call from Moscow late at night does he answer only "yes" or "no" and afterwards paces up and down the room, smoking, agitated, pleased with himself? What is he pleased with? I don't know, I'm not supposed to know. Why can't I see him off to the station?"

"It's not very convenient," says Sanya. "I'm not going alone. Maybe I won't go at all. If it'll be convenient I'll phone you from the railway station."

He did phone me to say the train was leaving in ten minutes. I mustn't worry, everything will be all right. He will write to me every day. He won't forget his parachute, of course...

From time to time: I receive letters bearing a Moscow postmark. Judging by these letters he gets mine regularly. People I don't know ring me up to find out how I am getting on. Somewhere a thousand miles away, in the mountains of Guadarrama, fighting is going on. A map with little flags pinned all over it hangs over my bedside table. Spain, faraway and mysterious, the Spain of Jose Diaz and Dolores Ibarruri, becomes as close to me as the street in which I spent my childhood.

On a rainy day in March the Republican aircraft—"everything that had wings"—fly out against the rebels, who plan to cut Valencia off from Madrid. It is the victory of Guadalajara. Where are you, Sanya?

In July the Republican army hurls the rebels back from Brunete. Where are you, Sanya? The Basque country is cut off communication with Bilbao is by means of old civil planes, flying in mist over the mountains. Where are you, Sanya?

"I'm being detained," he writes. "Anything might happen to me. Whatever happens, remember that you are free, without any obligations."

Then suddenly the impossible, the incredible happens. Such a simple thing, yet it makes everything a thousand times better-the weather, my health, everything.

He comes home-a late night phone call from Moscow, a scared Rosalia wakes me, and I run to the telephone... And a few days later he stands before me, looking thinner, bronzed, very much like a Spaniard. I pin the Order of the Red Banner to his tunic with my own hands.

In the autumn we are going to Ensk. Pyotr and his son and the "learned" Nanny spend the summer at Ensk every year, and Aunt Dasha keeps asking us down in every letter – and now, at last, we are going. Evening finds me standing by the carriage, mentally scolding Sanya,

because there are only five minutes to go before the train leaves and he hasn't come back yet, having gone off to buy a cake. He jumps aboard as the train moves off, breathless and gay. We sit for a long time in the semi-darkness of our compartment without putting on the lights.

When was that? We were returning from Ensk like grown-ups, and those old Nihilists, the Bubenchikovs aunts, with their big funny muffs were seeing us off. The little unshaven man kept trying to guess what we were—brother and sister? No resemblance. Husband and wife? Too young. And those lovely apples—red-cheeked, firm, winter apples! Why is it that people eat such apples only in childhood?

"It was the day I fell in love with you."

"It wasn't. You fell in love that day we were coming back from the skating-rink and you offered me some sweets, and I wouldn't take them, and you gave them away to some little toad of a girl."

"That was when you fell in love with me."

"No, I know it was you. Otherwise you wouldn't have given them away."

We stand in the corridor, watching the telegraph wires dipping and leaping past, as we had done then. Things are not the same any more, yet we are happy. The stout, moustachioed conductor keeps glancing at us-or at me perhaps? - and says, sighing, that he, too, has a beautiful daughter.

Ensk. Early morning. The trams are not running yet, and we have to walk right across the town. A polite ragamuffin carries our baggage and talks without a stop. All our efforts to stem the flow by telling him that we are natives of Ensk ourselves are in vain. He knows all the late Bubenchikovs, Aunt Dasha, and the judge-the judge in particular, whom he had had occasion to meet more than once.

"Where?"

"At the police court."

In the square, among the carts from which the farmers are selling apples and cabbages, stands Aunt Dasha weighing a head of cabbage in her hand, musing whether to take it or not. She has aged.

Sanya hails her. She eyes us sternly over her glasses the way old people do, then suddenly drops the cabbage from her listless hand.

"Sanya! My darlings! What are you doing here, in the market?"

"We're passing through on our way to you. Aunt Dasha—my wife." He leads me up to Aunt Dasha, and business in the Ensk market is suspended-even the horses take their noses out of their bags to gaze curiously at Aunt Dasha and me kissing.

The judge comes home late in the evening, when we had long ceased to expect him. Somewhere round the corner a flivver starts spluttering and the old man appears on the garden path in a dusty white cap, carrying two briefcases.

"Well, we have visitors I hear. I'll get washed, then come and kiss you."



We hear him grunting with pleasure and splashing about in the kitchen. Aunt Dasha grumbling about him making a mess of the floor again, but he keeps on grunting and snorting, exclaiming "Ah, that's good!", then finally he appears, his hair combed, his bare feet in slippers, and wearing a clean Russian blouse. He drags us out onto the doorsteps in turn to have a good look, first at me, then at Sanya. Sanya's decoration comes in for a special scrutiny. "Not bad," he says, looking pleased. "And a bar?" "Yes, a bar." "A captain, eh?" "Yes." He wrings Sanya's hand.

We sit at the table till late into the night, talking our heads off. We talk about Sasha, simply and naturally, as if she were with us. She is with us-little Pyotr becomes more and more like her with every passing month-that same Mongolian set of the eyes, the same soft dark hair on the temples. In bending his head, he lifts his eyebrows just as she used to do.

Sanya talks about Spain, and a queer, long-forgotten feeling grips me. I listen to him as though he were talking about somebody else. So it was he, who, going out one day on a reconnaissance flight, spotted five Junkers and closed in with them without hesitation? It was he who, diving in among the Junkers, fired almost at random, because it was impossible to miss? It was he who, covering his face with his glove, his

jacket smouldering, set down his wrecked plane and within the hour was up again in another.

We clink glasses and Sanya says in Spanish: *"Salud!"* Then, "Let's consider that our 'voyage into life' has only just begun. The ship put out of harbour yesterday and one can still see in the distance the lighthouse which had sent her its farewell signal: 'Happy sailing and success!' Once upon a time, small but brave, we walked through the dark quiet streets of this town. We were armed with only one Finnish knife between us, the knife for which Pyotr made a sheath out of an old boot. But we were better armed than might appear at first sight. We went forward because we had sworn to each other an oath:
'To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield.' We went forward and our road has not come to an end yet."

Saying this, Sanya raised his glass high, drained it and shattered it against the wall...

In 1941 we moved to Leningrad, hoping it is now for good. We rent a three-roomed summer cottage in the country with a well and a handsome old landlord who resembles one of the ancient Russian Streltsi and whom Pyotr immediately starts to paint. We live at this *dacha* all together, one family—the two Pyotrs and the Nanny did not go to Ensk that year—we bathe in the lake, drink tea from a real, brass pot-bellied samovar, and I find it odd that other women do not seem to notice this wonderful peace and happiness.

On Saturdays we go to meet Sanya. The whole family troop to the station, and the most eager to meet Uncle Sanya, of course, is little Pyotr, who secretly hopes he will bring him a battleship. His hope is justified. Sanya, a magnificent ship in one hand, jumps down from the step of a carriage, waves to us, but continues to walk alongside the moving carriage. The train stops and he holds out his hand. A little dried-up old woman steps down with a brisk preoccupied air, in one hand an umbrella, in the other a canvas travelling-bag. I can hardly believe my eyes. It is Grandma all right. Grandma in a chic pongee suit and a cute straw hat, whom he protectively pilots through the crowd which instantly fills the small platform...

I was very keen on having Grandma come and live with us when we decided to make our home in Leningrad. But each time I met her I was persuaded that it was impossible. She had less and less to say against Nikolai Antonich and spoke of him more and more with a sort of superstitious awe. Deep down in her heart she was convinced that he was endowed with supernatural powers.
"The moment I think of a thing, he knows it," she once said. "It's uncanny. The other day I decided to bake some pies, and he says: 'But not with sago. It's bad for the digestion.' "

What could have happened to make Grandma show up at our countryside station and stride briskly towards us, umbrella in one hand and travelling-bag in the other?

After a nap and a wash she appeared at table looking younger and spruce in a dress with leg-of-mutton sleeves and cream-coloured high boots with pointed toes.

"Got himself a housekeeper," she began without any preliminaries. '"Not a housekeeper, but a secretary,' he says. 'She'll help me too.' And she goes and puts her dirty shoes on my kitchen stove. Some help!"

The person who put her dirty shoes on the stove went by the name of Alevtina. It was most interesting. We were sitting in the garden. Grandma proudly telling her story, but so far it was difficult to make out what it was all about. I could see that Pyotr was dying to sketch her, but I wagged a finger at him warning him not to.
I did the same to Sanya, who could barely restrain his mirth. The only serious listener was little Pyotr.

"If you're a secretary, why d'you shove your shoes where I do my cooking. I'm not having any of that! Maybe I'll light the stove today?"

"Really?"

"And so I did."

"You did?"

"And burnt 'em to a cinder," quoth Grandma. "She'll know better next time."

We held our sides with laughter.

In short, the housekeeper lost her shoes, and the result was that Nikolai Antonich invited Grandma in for a serious talk.

"I'm this, I'm that!" said Grandma, puffing herself up the way Nikolai Antonich did when talking about himself. "Why don't you keep quiet if you're better than the next man. Let other people say it. Showed me the flat. 'Take your choice, Nina Kapitonovna!' "

Nikolai Antonich had been given a flat in a new house in Gorky Street and had offered poor old Grandma the choice of any room she liked in this splendid flat. He had been running around Moscow a whole month, selecting furniture. The old flat, Nikolai Antonich said, was to be turned into a "Captain Tatarinov Museum". The fact that Captain Tatarinov had never set foot in this flat did not seem to bother him.

"And I bowed to him and said: 'Much obliged, I'm sure. But I've never yet lived in other people's homes.' "

It was after this conversation that Grandma got the idea of leaving Nikolai Antonich and coming to live with us. But her fear of him was so great that instead of simply packing up and going away, she first made her peace with him and even with the housekeeper. She devised a cunning psychological plan based on Nikolai Antonich's departure for Bolshevo to spend *his* holiday at the Scientists' Rest Home. For the first time in twenty years she left home and sneaked out of Moscow, umbrella in one hand and travelling-bag in the other.

Sanya always got up after six and we'd go for a swim before breakfast. We did the same that morning, which looked no different from any other Sunday morning.

No different. Then why do I remember it so well? Why do I see, as though it were yesterday, Sanya and myself tripping down the hill hand in hand, and he balancing as he glides along the aspen tree thrown across the brook, while I take off my shoes and wade across, feeling the thick folds of the sandy bed with my feet? Why is it that I can repeat every word of our conversation? Why do I still feel the dreamy, misty delight of the river in the slanting beams of the sun? Why, with a tenderness that wrings my heart, do I remember every trivial detail of that morning - the drops of water on Sanya's tanned face, shoulders and chest and the wet tuft of hair on the back of his head when he comes out of the water and sits down beside me clasping his knees? And that boy, with his trousers rolled up, and carrying a home-made net, whom Sanya

had taught how to catch crabs with the aid of a campfire or a bait of rotten meat?

Because before some three or four hours had passed all this-our wonderful swim together, the dreamy pool of the river with its motionless banks reflected in it, the boy with the net and a thousand other thoughts, feelings and impressions—all this was suddenly gone, swept miles and miles away, looking small, insignificant and infinitely remote as if seen through the wrong end of binoculars.

September 3, 1941. If time could be made to stand still, I would have done it the moment when, running back to town and no longer finding Sanya there, I had got off the tram in Nevsky Prospekt and stopped in front of a huge shop window displaying the first communiquй issued by the High Command. Standing close to the window I read the communiquй, then turned to see the grave anxious faces behind me, and a curious feeling took hold of me, as if this reading of mine was taking place in some new strange life. That evening, the first warm evening that summer, the pale shadows walking the pavements, the moon riding the sky above the Admiralty spire with the sun still up—all these belonged to that mysterious new life. The first words in that life were written in heavy letters across the whole width of the window. People kept coming up to read them, and there was nothing you could do about it, however desperately you wanted to.

Rosalia had given me Sanya's note and I kept taking it out of my bag and reading it.

"Darling Pi-Mate," ran the hastily scribbled note on the bluish sheet from his pocket-diary, "I embrace you. Remember, you believe."

When we lived in the Crimea we had a dog named Pirate, who used to follow me about whenever I went. Sanya used to laugh and invented the name "Pi-Mate" for the two of us. "Remember, you believe"-those were my words. I had once said that I believed in his life. He was in excellent spirits. Though we didn't say goodbye to each other, he did not even mention it in his note, it didn't mean anything.

I returned to the *dacha* and spent the night there, but I don't think I slept a wink. I must have done, though, because I suddenly woke up dismayed, with a wildly beating heart. "It's war. And there's nothing you can do about it."

I got up and woke Nanny.

"We must pack up. Nanny. We're leaving tomorrow."

"You do keep changing your mind," Nanny said crossly, yawning.

She was sitting on the bed in a long white nightgown, grumbling sleepily, while I paced up and down the room, not listening to her, then flung the windows open. Out there, in the young, smiling wood, such a stillness reigned, such a joyous peace!

Grandma heard us talking and called me.

"What's the matter, Katya?" she demanded.

"We didn't say goodbye. Grandma! I don't know how it happened, but we didn't!"

She looked at me and gave me a kiss, then furtively made a sign of the cross.

"It's a good thing that you didn't. It's a good sign. It means that hell come back soon," she said, and I cried and felt that I couldn't bear it, just couldn't bear it.

Pyotr arrived by the evening train, looking tired and worried, but determined, which was quite unlike him.

It was from him that I first heard that children were to be evacuated from Leningrad, and it seemed so fantastic that we had to leave this cottage in the country, where we had been so happy, where Nanny and I had planted flowers—stocks and marigolds—and the first tender shoots were coming up, that we had to take little Pyotr in a crowded, dirty railway carriage, in this heat—all through June the weather had been cold, and now it had started getting hot and stuffy—take him not only to Leningrad, but farther to some other strange town!

Pyotr said that the Artists' Union was sending members' children to Yaroslavl Region. He had already signed on little Pyotr and Nina Kapitonovna. With Nanny, it was more difficult, but he would have to try again.

The train with the children was due to leave at four o'clock and it did so punctually on time. Pyotr came running up at the last moment. His son was handed to him through the window, and he took him in *his* arms and pressed his dark little head to his face. Grandma began to get nervous, so he kissed him hastily and handed him back.

To this day I cannot recall without distress that scene of the children going away, a distress that was all the more poignant because I feel so powerless to describe it adequately. Although I had lived through so much during those two months of war, and such strange, powerful impressions had stamped themselves for ever in my heart and mind, that day stands before me quite apart, all on its own.

September 7, 1941. Rosalia set up a first-aid station in the office of the former Elite Cinema and the local Defence Committee invited me to work there as a nurse, Rosalia having told them that I had some experience in nursing sick people.

"Bear in mind, my dear," the genial old doctor, a member of the Defence Committee, said to me in confidence, "if you refuse we shall immediately assign you to fortification work."

Work on fortifications, or "trenching", as people in Leningrad called it, was of course harder than nursing. Nevertheless, I said thank you and declined.

We went out late in the afternoon and dug anti-tank ditches all night. The ground was hard and clayey and had to be broken up first with a pick before a spade could be used. I found myself working with a team from one of Leningrad's publishing houses, which had already shown a high standard of performance in the "digging of Hitler's grave", as it was jokingly called. The team was made up almost entirely of women—typists, proof-readers, editors, many of them surprisingly well-dressed. I asked one pretty brunette, an editor, why she had turned up to dig trenches in such a smart dress, and she laughed and said that she simply hadn't any other.

The grey, spectral light that hung motionless between earth and sky was suddenly shot through with something fresh and morning-like, and even the faint breeze which stole through the field and stirred the bushes that masked the anti-aircraft guns seemed to generate a different, dawning light. Far out over the city the barrage balloons, silvered by the still invisible shafts of the sun, resembled huge amiable fishes.

Everyone looked rather wan by morning, and one girl felt faint, 4 but still, our team finished their stint ahead of the others. We were very thirsty, and the brunette with whom I had made friends overnight dragged me off to where people were queuing up for kvass. Tents had been pitched near an old, tumbledown church, and we queued up there. My editor friend on a sudden impulse suggested that we climb up the belfry. It was silly, because my back ached and I was dead tired, but to my own surprise I found myself consenting.

I recognised our section from above by the hand-barrow stuck into the ground with a wall newspaper fixed to it. New people were coming up to it. Had we done so little, I wondered? But our section merged into another, and that into another, on and on. As far as the eye could see, women were breaking the clay in ten-foot deep ditches, throwing it out with shovels and carrying it away in wheel-barrows. There was not one amongst them who would not have laughed heartily had anyone told her two months before that she would drop her home and her work and go outside town at night into an empty field to dig up the earth and build ditches, earthworks and trenches. But they had gone out and now had nearly completed these gigantic belts which girdled the city and broke off only at the roadblocks.

I got home the next day at noon. Dog-tired, I lay down and closed my eyes. The moment I did so my head began to swim with whirling visions of girls lifting barrows loaded with hard, heavy clay, wheelbarrows slowly sliding along planks, and the sun gleaming on the dark-red walls of the trenches.

Then daylight broke through, faint and lingering after the bright night, and the paling world slipped away from me as I began to drop off. I felt so good, so wonderfully good, but for that dreary long-drawn moan-or was it a song?-which came from behind the partition. How I wished it would stop...

"Katya, the alert!"

Rosalia was shaking me by the shoulder.

"Get up, it's the alert!"

September 16, 1941. A few days ago I met Varya Trofimova in Nevsky. She was the wife of an aviator. Hero of the Soviet Union, with whom Sanya had served in the S.P.A. Varya and I had travelled together to Saratov once to visit our husbands, and I remember having been surprised to learn that she was a dentist.

She was a tall, ruddy-cheeked, robust woman, who walked with a purposeful stride. She reminded me somehow of Kiren, especially when she laughed loudly, showing her long beautiful teeth.

"And my Grisha," she said with a sigh, "would you believe it, he's bombing Berlin. Did you read about it?"

We fell into conversation and she suggested that I come and work at the Stomatological Clinic of the Military Medical Academy.

While I was turning this over in my mind Varya added quickly that I had better come and see what it was like first, because one young lady she had recommended had given up the job after two days, saying that she couldn't stand the smell.

Varya hated "young ladies"- that, too, I remembered from the time we went to Saratov together.

As a matter of fact the smell really was impossible-it hit me the moment I entered the corridor, which had wards on both sides. It was a

smell that made me feel sick right away and kept me feeling sick all the time Varya Trofimova was introducing me to the other nurses, the radiologist, the head physician's wife and a lot of other people.

Here lay men who had been wounded in the face. Just as I arrived they brought in a young man who had had his face blown away by a mine.

In nursing these men-I realised this the second or third day of my work there—one had to keep reassuring them, as it were, that it didn't matter, there was nothing to worry about if a scar remained, that they must grin and bear it and hardly anything would be noticeable. But how was one to deal with that hidden, unspoken fear lurking behind every word, that horror with which a man gets his first glimpse at his own disfigured face, that endless standing in front of the mirror on the eve of discharge, those pathetic attempts to look smart, spruce themselves up?

September 23, 1941. Yesterday I spent the night at home instead of at the hospital, and early in the morning I went in search of Rosalia, since there was no one in the flat. I found her in the courtyard. Three boys were standing in front of her and she was teaching them how to mix paint.

"Too thick is as bad as too thin," she was saying, "Where's the board? Vorobyov, don't scratch yourself. Try it on the board. Not all at once."

Automatically, she started to speak to me in the same lecturing tone.

"Fire-prevention measures. Painting of attics and other wooden upper structures. Fire-resistant mixture. I'm teaching the children to use paint... Oh, Katya, look at me!" she exclaimed. "There's a letter for you! I have paint on my hands, pull it out."

I put my hand in her pocket and drew out a letter from Sanya...

I ran through it first to learn whether anything had happened to him, then I reread it more slowly, word by word.

"Do you remember Grisha Trofimov?" he wrote towards the end of the letter. "We used to spray Paris green together over the lakes. Yesterday we buried him."

I did not remember Trofimov very well. He had flown off somewhere almost as soon as I arrived in Saratov. I had no idea that he had been serving in the same regiment as Sanya. Then I pictured Varya, poor Varya, and the letter dropped from my hand, the sheets scattering on the ground.

It was time to go to the hospital, but I found myself trudging back to the house, forgetting that I had given Rosalia the key to the flat. On the stairs I ran into the "learned nurse", who at once began complaining that she couldn't fix up anywhere-nobody would employ her because there wasn't enough to eat-and that one domestic help had got a job with the Tree-Planting Trust, but she no longer had the strength for such work, etc., etc. I listened to her, thinking:

"Varya, poor Varya."

Arriving at the hospital, where I avoided going into the Stomatological Clinic for fear of running into Varya, I reread the letter, and it struck me that Sanya had never written me such letters. I recollected that one day in the Crimea he had come home pale and tired, saying that the stuffy heat gave him a pain at the back of his head. But next morning his navigator's wife told me that their plane had caught fire in the air and they had made a crash landing with a load of bombs. I ran to Sanya, but he said with a laugh: "You dreamt it."

Sanya, who had always sheltered me, who deliberately spared me any knowledge of the dangers of his professional life - Sanya had suddenly written-and in such detail-about the death of a comrade. He had even described Trofimov's grave.

"In the middle we laid out some dud shells and large stabilisers with smaller ones for a border, making a sort of flowerbed with iron flowers."

The locker containing my white overall was in the Stomatological Clinic and I hastily put it on and went out onto the landing leading to the hospital. Just before I reached my ward I heard Varya's voice, saying: "You must do it yourself if the patient can't do it yet." She was telling off one of the nurses for not having washed out a patient's mouth with hydrogen peroxide, and her voice was the same firm, ordinary voice as that of yesterday and the day before, and she walked out of the ward with the same brisk mannish stride, issuing instructions as she went. I glanced at her-the same old Varya. She knew nothing. For her nothing had happened yet.

Ought I to tell her that her husband had been killed? Or should I say nothing, and leave it for that sad day to bring her the black message: "Killed in action in defence of *his* country", a message that was coming to hundreds and thousands of our women. At first she would not grasp it, her heart would refuse to accept it, then it would start fluttering like a captive bird. There was no escape from it, nowhere you could hide away from it. This grief was yours—receive it! All that day I hurried past the room where Varya was working without raising my eyes.

The day dragged on endlessly, with the wounded coming in all the time until the wards were full up and the senior sister sent me to the head physician to ask whether she might put some beds in the corridor.

I knocked on the door, first softly, then louder. There was no answer. I opened the door a little and saw Varya.

The head physician was not there and she must have been waiting for him, standing there by the window, her shoulders slightly bent, drumming monotonously on the window-pane with her fingers.

She did not turn round, did not hear me come in, did not see me standing in the doorway. Slowly, she moved away from the window and struck her head hard against the wall several times.

"It was the first time in my life that I saw anyone actually beating his head against a wall. She was striking the wall not with her forehead, but sort of sideways, probably so that it should hurt more. And she did not cry. Her face was expressionless, as though she were engaged in some routine procedure. Then suddenly she pressed her face to the wall and flung her arms wide.

She knew. All that hard, wearisome day, when non-urgent operations had had to be put off because there were not enough hands to deal with new arrivals, when there was nowhere to put the patients and everyone was fretting and upset, she alone had worked as though nothing had happened. In Ward No. 1 she had been teaching one poor lad with a lolling tongue to speak-and she had known. She had told the cook off in a dull voice because the potatoes had not been properly mashed and got stuck in the patients' tubes-and she had known. Her brusque, firm voice could be heard now in one ward, now in another, and nobody in the world would have guessed that she knew.

December 8, 1941. As clearly as I used to remember the days when Sanya and I met, I now remember the days when I got letters from him.

The letter I received from him on September 23rd, in which he wrote of Grisha Trofimov's death, was the third and the last. I have received nothing since.

I am writing this in the light of an oil "blinker", wrapped up in a winter coat. There is a terrible draught from the window, which has been smashed in by an air blast and covered up with pillows, and every other minute I have to take a tin with hot water in my hands to warm them. But I must write this, even though my fingers are freezing and my head is reeling from hunger.

There have been no letters. I don't think I had ever worked so hard in my life as I did that autumn. I attended the Red Cross courses, went to the front and was even mentioned in despatches for bringing back wounded men under heavy fire. But still no letters. In vain I searched for Sanya's name among the airmen who had been decorated for raids on Berlin, Konigsberg and Ploesti.

But I worked like mad, gathering up speed like a runaway train that tears ahead, ignoring signals, sounding its whistle as it plunges into the autumn night.

Then came a day when the train rushed past me, leaving me lying under the embankment, lonely, broken, steeped in misery.

Varya was with me that evening. The sirens started off, as usual, at seven thirty. We sat through the first alert, though Rosalia phoned and in the name of the Self-Defence Group ordered us to go down. We sat through the second alert too. The bomb-shelters always depressed me, and I had long decided that if I was to be one of the "unlucky" ones I'd rather it was out in the open, under Leningrad's skies. Besides, we were roasting coffee—an important job, seeing that this was not only coffee, but flatcakes too, if you added a little flour to the grounds. Leningrad was beginning to starve.

But a third alert came on, bombs fell nearby and the house rocked, as though it had taken a step forward then back. The saucepans came tumbling down in the kitchen. Varya took my arm and marched me downstairs, ignoring my protests. Women were standing in the dark entrance hall, talking in quick anxious tones. I recognised the voice of the yardkeeper, a Tatar woman named Gul Ijberdeyeva, whom everybody in the building called Masha.

"Number Nine's hit," she was saying. "Hit hard. House manager-he give order-take spades, go, dig him up."

"Number Nine" was the building which housed Delicatessen Shop No. 9.'

"Take spade, come along. All come! Who has no spade will get spade there. Come on, missus! When you get hit, they'll dig you out."

"Number Nine" had been cleft into two. The bomb had gone through all five floors. Through the black jagged gap you could see a narrow Leningrad courtyard with fantastic broken shadows. The facade of the building had collapsed, blocking the roadway with its debris. Sticking out of the tangled mass of rubble, furniture and steel girders was the black wing of a grand piano. A sideboard hung suspended from the fourth floor, and a coat and a lady's hat could distinctly be seen on the wall.

It was quiet all round. People approached the building at a leisurely pace, oddly calm, and their voices, too, were slow and guarded. A

woman started to scream, then threw herself on the ground. She was raised and carried aside and all grew quiet again. A dead old man in a coat white with plaster and rubble lay on the pavement. People stopped short, peered into his face and slowly walked round him. The basement was flooded. Something had to be done first about the water. A slim, agile sergeant, who was in charge of the rescue work, set me to man the pump.

Flushed and beautiful, Varya wrenched mattresses, blankets and pillows out of the heap of wrecked furniture, laid out the injured on them, applied artificial respiration, shouted at the stretcher-bearers, and kept the two ambulance doctors on the run, obedient to her every word.

Hitching up her skirt, she went down into the basement and came out carrying a wet man across her shoulder. The sergeant ran up to help, followed by the stretcher-bearers.

"Sit him up!" she commanded.

It was a soldier or an officer. He had no cap and his army coat was sodden and black from the water. They sat him up. His head dropped on his chest. Varya took him by the chin, and his head lolled back like a doll's. There was something familiar about that pale face with the dark-yellow matted hair clinging to his forehead, and I worked for several minutes, trying to recollect where I had seen him.

"There, he'll be all right in a minute," Varya said gruffly.

She forced his teeth open and put two fingers into his mouth. He shook his head violently and his body twitched as he started to draw *his* breath, wheezing and gasping.

"Aha, bite, would you?" Varya said.

The pump handle kept going up and down and I could see what Varya was doing to him only in snatches. Now he was sitting and breathing heavily with *his* eyes shut, his face with the flattened nose and square jaw startlingly white in the moonlight, as though etched in chalk-a face which I had seen a thousand times and which I now scarcely recognised.

To this day I can't make out why I had not let Romashov-for it was he-be taken to the hospital. Incredible as it may seem, I was glad, when, sitting on the ground in Ms unbuttoned army coat, he raised his eyes with a glazed stricken look, saw me as if through a mist, and said in a barely audible whisper, "Katya." He wasn't surprised to find me standing there in front of him with a little bottle of something which Varya said he was to smell. But when I took his hand to feel his pulse, he clenched his teeth, shuddering, and repeated still louder: "Katya, Katya."

In the morning we started off home. We staggered along, Varya and I just as bad as Romashov, although no bomb had cleaved five floors over us, and we had not floundered in a flooded basement.

Varya and I trudged along, while Masha and some other woman all but dragged Romashov along behind us. He kept worrying about his kitbag, afraid it would get lost, until Masha angrily thrust it under *his* nose, saying:

"Don't think about bag. Think about God. Your life saved, you fool! You should pray, read Koran!"

He was still sleeping when we left—Rosalia had made up a bed for him in the dining-room. The blanket had slipped and he was sleeping in

clean underwear. Varya, in passing, straightened the blanket with an habitual gesture and tucked it under him. He was breathing through clenched teeth and a slit of eyeball was visible through the eyelids-a Romashov true to life, not to be confused with any other Romashov in the world.

Somehow it seemed to me that he would disappear by the evening, like a vision that belonged to that vanished night. But he didn't. When I rang up, it was he, and not Rosalia, who answered the telephone.

"Katya, I must talk to you," he said in a firm, yet, deferential tone. "When will you be back? Or may I come and see you?"

"You may come."

"Won't it be rather awkward, though, at the hospital?"

"I daresay it will. But I won't be home for several days."

He was silent for a while.

"I realise that you haven't the slightest desire to see me. But that was such a long time ago... The reason why you did not want to meet me-"

"Oh, no, not so very long ago."

Silence.

"This is no accident, our meeting. I was on my way to see you. I rushed down into the basement when I heard someone shout that there were children there. We must meet, because it's a matter that concerns you."

"What matter?"

"A very important matter. I'll tell you all about it."

My heart missed a beat, as though I didn't know who it was speaking to me.

"Well?"

Now he was silent, and for so long that I very nearly hung up.

"All right, you needn't see me. I'm going away and you will never see me again. But I swear..."

He said something in a whisper. I could see him standing there, teeth clenched and eyes shut, breathing heavily into the mouthpiece, and that silence and despair suddenly decided me. I said I would come, and rang off.

Cheese and butter on the table—that's what I saw when, letting myself in with the latchkey, I stopped in the doorway of the dining-room. It was unbelievable—real cheese, red Dutch cheese, and the butter, too, was real, in a big enamelled mug. Bread of a kind we had not seen in Leningrad for a long time was cut up in generous slices. Romashov was engaged in opening some tins of food with a kitchen knife when I came in. From the kitbag lying on the table the tip of a bottle could be seen projecting.

Rosalia came out of the bedroom, excited and happy. "Katya," she whispered to me, "what about Bertha? May I invite her?"

"I don't know."

"My God, you're angry? But I only wanted to know—" "Misha," I broke in, "Rosalia here wants to find out whether she can invite her sister Bertha to the table."

"What a question! Where is she? I'll invite her myself." "You'll scare her, I'm afraid."

He laughed awkwardly. "Supper is served, ladies!"

It was a gay supper. Poor Rosalia prepared the sandwiches with trembling hands and ate them with a religious expression. Bertha, frail, grey, with a peaked little nose and wandering glance, whispered something over every morsel. Romashov chattered without a stop-chattered and drank.

That was when I got a good look at him!

We hadn't seen each other for some years. He had been rather stout then. His face and body, with its slight backward tilt, had shown those signs of solidity peculiar to a man who was beginning, to put on weight. Like all ugly people, he took pains to dress immaculately, even foppishly.

Now he was gaunt and skinny, tightly strapped in new leather harness, clad in an army tunic with an officer's insignia-not a major, surely? His skull bones were now prominent. His eyes, unblinking, wide-open, seemed to have something new in them-weariness perhaps?

"I've changed, haven't I?" he said, seeing that I was studying him. "The war has turned me inside out. Everything is changed-body and soul."

If it was changed he would not be telling me about it.

"Where did you get all this food, Misha? Stole it?"

Apparently he did not hear the last two words.

"Tuck in, tuck in! I'll get some more. You can get anything here. You people just don't know how to go about it."

"Really?"

"Yes, of course. You have to know the right people."

I don't know what he meant by that, but instinctively I put my sandwich back onto the plate.

"Have you been in Leningrad long?"

"Two days. I was transferred from Moscow at the disposal of the chief of Voentorg *(-a retail organisation of army and navy stores.— Tr.)* I was at the Southern Front. Caught in encirclement. Broke through by nothing short of a miracle."

It was the truth, for me a shocking truth, but I listened to him carelessly, with a long-forgotten sense of my power over him.

"We retreated towards Kiev. We didn't know that Kiev was cut off. We thought the Germans were God knows where, but they met us near Khristinovka, within two hundred kilometres of the front. It was hell," he added with a laugh. "But that's another story. Now I wanted to tell you that I saw Nikolai Antonich in Moscow. Strange to say, he stayed in Moscow, didn't evacuate."

"Is that so?" I said indifferently.

We were silent for a while.

"Didn't you want to talk to me about something, Misha?" I said at length. "If so, come into my room."

He stood up and straightened his back. Drew his breath and adjusted his belt.

"Yes. Do you mind if I take some wine with us?"

"No."

"Which one?"

"Anyone you like, I won't drink."

He took a bottle and some glasses from the table, thanked Rosalia and followed me out. We settled down-I on the sofa, he at the table, which

had once been Sasha's. Her paint brushes in a tall glass still stood on it untouched.

"It's a long story."

He was agitated. I was calm.

"A very long and... Do you smoke?"

"No."

"Lots of women have started smoking during the war."

"I know. They're waiting for me at the hospital. You have exactly twenty minutes."

"Very good," Romashov enunciated slowly. "I won't tell the story of how I came to be in the South. We fought near Kiev and were defeated."

He said "we".

"At Khristinovka I joined a hospital train which was making for Uman, bypassing Kiev. They were ordinary goods trucks with the wounded lying in them on bunks. A lot of them badly wounded. We travelled three, four, five days, in stuffy heat and dust..."

Bertha was praying in the next room.

He got up and shut the door.

"I was shell-shocked a couple of days before I joined the hospital train. True, just lightly-stabs once in a while in my left side. It still gets sort of brownish, you know," he added with a strained smile.

Varya, who had changed his clothes that night, had said that his left side was burnt-I suppose that is what he called "gets brownish".

"I found myself taking things in hand on our train-managing the household, you know. The first thing to be done was to organise meals, and I'm proud to say that throughout the journey-we were a good fortnight travelling-no one died of starvation. But I'm not talking about myself."

"About whom then?"

"Two girls, students from a Teachers' College at Stanislav, were travelling with us. They carried meals to the wounded, changed dressings, did everything they could. Then one day one of them called me to an airman, a wounded airman lying in one of the trucks."

Romashov poured out some wine.

"I asked the girls what it was about. 'Talk to him.' 'What about?' 'He doesn't want to live, says he'll shoot himself, cries.' We went to see him-it so happened that I had never been in that particular truck before. He was lying on his face, his legs bandaged, but very carelessly, clumsily. The girls sat down next to him, called him..."

Romashov fell silent.

"Why don't you have a drink, Katya?" he said in a voice that had gone husky. "I'm drinking all by myself. I'll get drunk-what will you do then?"

"Turn you out. Finish your story."

He tossed off the glass, took a walk round the room, and sat down again. I took a sip. After all, the world was full of airmen!

Here is the story as Romashov told it.

Sanya had been wounded in the face and legs. The lacerated wound in the face was healing. He had said nothing about the circumstances in which he was wounded-Romashov got that quite by accident from the army newspaper *Red Falcons,* which carried a paragraph about Sanya. He was bringing me that newspaper, and would have brought it but for

that stupid accident, when he almost got drowned in the basement trying to save the children. But that didn't matter, he remembered the paragraph by heart:

"While returning from a mission the aircraft piloted by Captain Grigoriev was overtaken by four enemy fighter planes. In the unequal combat Grigoriev shot down one Fighter, and put the others to flight. Though his machine was damaged, Grigoriev flew on. Not far from the front-line he was attacked again, this time by two Junkers. Grigoriev, his machine in flames, rammed one of the Junkers. The men of the X air unit will forever cherish the memory of their brave comrades, Captain Grigoriev, Navigator Luri, Radio Operator-Gunner Karpenko and Aerial Gunner Yershov, who fought for their country to their last breath."

This might not be the exact text, the words might be in a different order, but the substance of it was correct-Romashov was prepared to vouch for it with his life. He had kept the copy of the paper in his dispatch-case together with other papers, very important ones, but the dispatch-case had fallen into the water, the newspaper had become wet pulp, and when he had dried it he found that the column containing the paragraph was missing. But that did not matter.

Sanya, then, was considered killed, but he was only wounded—wounded in the face and legs. In the face only lightly, but in the legs evidently seriously. At any rate, he couldn't go about unaided.

"How did he come to be in the train?" "I don't know," said Romashov, "we didn't speak about it." "Why not?" "Because an hour after our talk, twenty kilometres short of Khristinovka our train was shot up by German tanks." That's what he said, "shot up."

It was unexpected, running into German tanks behind our own lines. The train stopped-the locomotive was put out of action by the first shell. The wounded started to jump out onto the embankment, scattering, and the Germans used shrapnel on them, firing through the train.

First thing, Romashov ran to Sanya. It was no easy job-dragging him out of the truck under fire, but Romashov did it and they hid behind the wheels. The badly wounded screamed in the trucks:
"Brothers, help!" and the Germans kept on firing. It was getting close to where they lay and Sanya said: "Run, I have a pistol, they won't get me." But Romashov did not leave him. He dragged him aside into a ditch, knee-deep in the mud, though Sanya struggled with him and swore. Then a lieutenant with a burnt face helped Romashov to drag him across the swampy ground, and there left them, the two of them, in a wet little aspen wood.

It was terrifying, because a big German tank-mounted force had seized the nearest railway station; fighting was going on all round, and at any moment the Germans might make their appearance in the wood, which was the only defensible spot in a stretch of open country. They had to move on, there wasn't a minute to be lost. But the wound on Sanya's face had opened, and he kept telling Romashov: "Leave me, you'll never make it with me!" And once he said: "I thought that in my position I'd have to fear you." When he put his legs down the pain was unbearable. Romashov made a crutch for him out of a tree branch. But Sanya could not walk all the same, so Romashov went alone-not forward, but back to the train in the hope of finding those Stanislav girls. But he did not get to the train, the Germans opened fire on him on the edge of the marsh. He went back.

"I got back in an hour, maybe a little more," Romashov said, "and I didn't find him. It was a small wood and I searched the length and breadth of it. I was afraid to shout but nevertheless I did, several times. There was no answer. I searched all night until finally I dropped down and fell asleep. In the morning I found the spot where we had parted. The moss was torn up and trampled down, and the crutch lay under a tree..."

Afterwards Romashov had got caught in an encirclement, but broke through to our troops with a detachment of sailors off the Dnieper Flotilla. He never heard about Sanya again.

I had pictured to myself a thousand times how I would get to know about this. A letter would come, an ordinary letter without a stamp, and I would open it—and the world would be blotted out. Or Varya would come—Varya, whom I had tried so many times to comfort—and she would try to break the news to me gently, starting from afar with: "If he were killed, what would you do? " And I would answer:
"I wouldn't survive it." Or I would be standing in a queue with other women at the Military Registration Office, and we would be looking at one another, all thinking the same thing: "Who would it be today? " I had thought of everything, but never had it entered my mind that I would hear about this from Romashov.

It was all nonsense, of course. He had made it up or read something like it in a magazine. Most likely he had made it up. The calculated cunning so characteristic of him was evident in his every word. But how unfair, how painful it was to have this stupid, this harrowing game played out at my expense! To have this man turn up in Leningrad, where life was hard enough without him, in order to deceive me so meanly!

"Misha," I began very calmly, "all this is a lie and you know it. If you don't admit it and ask my forgiveness, I'll drive you out like the cad you are. When did this happen-all you've been telling me? "

"In September."

"There, you see—in September. And I received a letter dated the twentieth of October in which Sanya writes that he is alive and well and may fly in to Leningrad for a day or two if his chiefs permitted. Now what do you say to that, Misha? "

I don't know where I got the strength to lie at such a moment! I had received no letter dated October twentieth. I had not heard from Sanya for over a month.

Romashov smiled wryly.

"It's a good thing that you didn't believe me," he said. "Never mind, it's all for the best."

"So it was all a lie, then? "

"Yes," said Romashov, "it's a lie."

He should have argued with me, should have tried to convince me, lost his temper, he should-like that time in Dogs' Place-have stood before me with trembling lips. But he said impassively: "Yes, it's a lie."

My heart sank, went cold and leaden within me.

He must have sensed it. He came up and took my hand-easily and boldly. I wrenched it free.

"If I wanted to deceive you I would simply have shown you the newspaper, which reports in black and white that Sanya was killed. But I told you what nobody else in the world knows. It is ridiculous," he said

haughtily, "to think that I did this for base personal motives. Or that I believed that such news could help me win your favour? But it's the truth, and I dare not conceal it from you."

I still sat motionless, but everything around me began to drift away-Sasha's table with the brushes in the tall glass and that red-haired soldier at the table, whose name I had forgotten. I was silent, I didn't want anything, but the soldier for some reason hastily left the room and came back with a grey, elegant little woman, who clutched her head when she saw me and cried: "Katya, my God! Give me some water! What's the matter, Katya? "

December 30, 1941. Bertha died a fortnight ago, on one of our "alert" days, when the bombing started first thing in the morning, or rather continued from overnight. She did not die from starvation—poor Rosalia repeated a dozen times that starvation had nothing to do with it.

She wanted to have her sister buried the same day, as the ritual required. But it was impossible. So then she hired a long, mournful Jew, and he read prayers all night over the dead woman, who lay on the floor in a shroud made from two separate bedsheets - this, too, was in accordance with the ritual. The bombs were falling very near, not a single pane of glass was left whole that night in Maxim Gorky Prospekt, and the streets were bright and ghastly with the lurid glow of conflagrations, while that mournful man sat mumbling prayers, then quietly fell asleep. Coming into the room at daybreak I found him peacefully sleeping next to the dead woman with his prayer-book under his head.

Romashov managed to obtain a coffin—at that time, a fortnight ago, it was still possible—and when that thin little old woman was laid into that huge, rough-hewn box, it looked as if even there, in the coffin, she were cowering with terror in a corner.

One had to dig the grave oneself-the grave-diggers, Romashov thought, demanded an "outrageous" price. He hired boys to do it — the same boys whom Rosalia had taught to paint.

Very animated, he ran downstairs ten times, held whispered conferences with the house manager, patted Rosalia on the shoulder, and ended up by getting angry with her for insisting on having Bertha buried in a shroud of two separate bedsheets.

"Sheets can be bartered for bread! " he shouted. "She doesn't need them. In any case somebody will take them off her in a day or two."

I sent him about his business and told Rosalia that everything would be the way she wanted it.

It was early morning. Tiny brittle snowflakes eddied in the air, then suddenly, as if in a hurry, fell to the ground, when Romashov and the boys carried the coffin out, bumping against the walls and turning awkwardly on the landings, and placed it on a hand sled in the yard. I wanted to give the boys money, but Romashov said he had arranged to pay them with bread.

"A hundred grams per head in advance," he said gaily. "Okay, boys? "

The boys nodded consent without looking at him.

"Are you going upstairs, Katya? " he went on. "Will you please fetch the bread. It's in my coat."

I don't know why he put the bread in his coat—maybe to conceal it from Rosalia or that Jew. The coat hung in the hall.

I remember thinking as I went upstairs that I ought to dress warmer. I had been feeling a bit feverish in the night and I daresay it would be better for me not to go to the cemetery, which was said to be a good seven kilometres away. But I was afraid that without me Rosalia would drop on the way.

The piece of bread, wrapped in a bit of paper, was in the coat pocket. Together with the bread I pulled out what felt like a soft little bag. It dropped on the floor and I opened the door on the landing to pick it up, it being dark in the hall. It was a yellow chamois-leather tobacco-pouch: among other gifts, we sent such tobacco-pouches to the front for the soldiers. After a moment's thought I untied it. Inside lay a photograph broken in half and some rings. "Trucked them somewhere," I thought with disgust. The photograph was an old one, and had some writing on the back, which was hard to make out, as the letters had completely faded. I was about to put the photo back but some odd feeling restrained me, a feeling that I had once held this tobacco-pouch in my hand.

I went out onto the landing, where there was more light, and began to spell out the writing. "If it's worth..." I read. A white sharp light flashed before my eyes and stabbed my very heart. The writing on the photograph read: "If it's worth doing at all, do it well."

I don't know what happened to me. I screamed, then found myself sitting on the landing, groping about for that photograph. Through a darkness that clouded my eyes I read the inscription and recognised C. in a flying helmet, which made him look like a woman. C. with *his* large eagle-like face and kind sombre eyes looking out from under his heavy eyebrows. It was the photograph of C., which Sanya had always carried about with him. He kept it in his pocket-book together with other documents, though I had told him a thousand times that the photograph would be worn away in his pocket and that it should be framed and placed on his desk.

In a fury, I rushed back into the hall, tore the coat off the hanger and flinging it out on to the landing, turned the pockets out. Sanya was dead, killed. I don't know what I was looking for. Romashov had killed him. The other pocket contained some money. I crushed the notes and threw them down the stair-well. Killed him and taken the photograph. I did not cry. Stole the documents, all the papers, maybe the disk as well, so that nobody should know that this dead man in the wood, this corpse in the wood, was Sanya. "Other papers, very important ones, in the dispatch-case"—the words rang in my ears and it seemed as if someone had lighted a lantern in front of every word of Romashov's.

This photograph had been in the dispatch-case. Other papers and the newspaper *Red Falcons* had been there, too, but they had got soaked and were ruined-hadn't Romashov said, "The newspaper had become wet pulp"? But the photograph was intact, maybe because Sanya had always carried it wrapped in tracing-paper.

Voices could be heard below. Rosalia was calling me. I slipped the photograph in my bosom and put the tobacco-pouch back into the pocket. I hung the coat up again, went downstairs and gave the bread to Romashov.

"What's the matter?" he said. "Aren't you well?"

"No, I'm all right."

There was nothing. No empty, soundless streets through which people walked in silence, slowly dragging their feet as in a frightful slow dream.

No ice-encrusted tramcars stranded in the middle of the streets with thick ledges of snow hanging from them like from the eaves of country cottages. No narrow tracks running away behind us as we dragged the hand sled on which, swaddled like a child, lay a small body. I recollected then that Romashov had had the coffin left behind because there was no room for it on the sled.

"That's all right, we'll sell it," he had said.

As for Rosalia, she must have gone mad, because she said it was the proper rite to have no coffin. I remembered this, then immediately forgot it. A little girl with a tiny old woman's face stepped into the snow to let us pass—there was no room for two on the narrow path trodden down Pushkarskaya Street. Someone passed us in an oddly loose dangling overcoat—a man with a briefcase slung across his shoulder on a string. This, too, I saw and immediately forgot it. I saw everything-the snowed-up streets, the swaddled body on the little sled, and another body some woman was towing on the other side of the road, and who kept stopping and finally dropped behind. Like traceless shadows that glide noiselessly across glass, the freezing city passed before me all white, buried in snow.

I was seeing another scene, one that smote my heart cruelly. Legs stretched out in dirty bandages yellow with blood, lay Sanya with his cheek to the ground and his murderer standing over him-alone, all alone in a wet little aspen wood. Shoulders hunched, blue with cold, my arm in that of Rosalia's, who could barely move-she had so many clothes on—I trudged along behind the sled which moved far ahead, then, drew near when the boys stopped to have a smoke. Two lonely pathetic old women—we looked much the same, she and I. The similarity must have struck Romashov, too, for he caught up with us and said irritably: "Why did you have to go? You'll catch your death of cold. Go back, Katya, go home!"

I looked at him-alive and hale. In *his* white new sheepskin coat, shoulder harness and holster at his belt. Alive! I caught the air with open mouth. And hale! I bent down and put some snow in my mouth. The spade tied to the body glinted, and I stared and stared at its hypnotic glitter.

The cemetery. We waited for a long time in a small, dirty office with white strips of hoarfrosted tow running between the logs of the timbered walls. The clerk, a woman with a bloated face, sat by an iron little stove, her feet, wrapped in rags, thrust out close to the fire. Romashov for some reason was shouting at her. Then they called us—the grave was ready. The boys, leaning on their spades, stood on a mound of earth and snow. What a shallow resting-place they had made for poor Bertha! Romashov sent them for the body. Soon they came back with her. The long mournful Jew walked behind the sled and from time to time commanded a halt to read a short prayer. Romashov laid ropes out on the snow, deftly lifted the body and kicked the sled away. Now she was lying on the ropes. Rosalia gave her sister a last kiss. The Jew sang, now raising his voice with surprising stresses, now dropping to a low tone, like a mournful old bird.

We went back to the office to warm up—1 and Romashov. He made mysterious signs to me and slapped his pocket as we approached the door. Inside he drew out a bottle.

"Have some?" he said.

Oh, how my heart began to burn and swell, what hot waves surged through my arms and legs! I felt hot. I undid my coat, threw off my warm shawl. I walked, walked about the office, on light, springy feet.

"Some more?"

The woman with the bloated face looked at us hungrily, and I told Romashov to pour some out for her. He did so—"Ah well, in for a penny!"—gay, pale, with red ears, fur cap tilted back at a rakish angle. I, too, felt gay, in jocular mood. I picked up from the desk one of the black painted grave plates and held it out to Romashov.

"This is for you."

He laughed.

"Now that's more like my old Katya!"

"Not yours!"

He came over and took hold of my hands. His mouth began to quiver, a small, childlike mouth that revealed his teeth—strange that I never noticed before what sharp small teeth he had.

"Yes, mine," he said huskily.

I drew my right hand away. There was a hammer on the window' sill-I suppose it was used for nailing the plates to the crosses. Very slowly I picked up the hammer. It was a small but heavy one, with an iron handle.

Had the blow struck his temple, I daresay I would have killed him. But he recoiled and the hammer slid down and cut open *his* cheek-bone. The woman sprang to her feet, screaming, and made a dash for the door. Romashov leapt after her and hustled her back into the room, slamming the door. Then he went up to me.

"Leave me alone!" I said with despair and loathing. "You're a murderer! You killed Sanya."

He was silent. The blood was gushing from his gashed cheek. He rubbed it with his hand, but it kept dripping down onto his shoulder and chest, and his sheepskin coat was covered with wet pink stains.

"I must stanch it," he muttered without looking at me. "Have you a clean handkerchief, Katya?"

"All right, let's say I killed him! In that case why should I have saved that photograph of his? We wanted to bury the documents. Sanya was holding them in his hands and the photo must have dropped out. I didn't tell you I had found it—1 was afraid you wouldn't believe me. My God, you can't imagine what war is like! What a crazy idea— to think that I could have killed one of our own men! No matter who it was, how I felt about him! To kill a wounded man—Katya! Why, it's crazy, nobody would believe it!"

This was not the first time Romashov had repeated those words:

"Nobody would believe it." He was afraid that I would write of my suspicions to the Military Tribunal or the Procurator. He gave all his money and bread to the woman in the cemetery office, and I heard him say to her: "Not a word to anybody." He did not go to the hospital. Rosalia stopped the blood and put a plaster on the big gash in his cheek.

"I had no love for him, it's true, and I don't intend to conceal the fact," Romashov went on. "But when I found him with those crippled legs, with the pistol at his head, lying in that filthy truck, it wasn't him I was thinking of, it was you. No wonder he was glad to see me—he realised

that I was his salvation. And it wasn't my fault that he strayed away when I went to fetch someone to help with a stretcher."

He paced the little kitchen, talking and talking without a stop. He clutched his head and when he did that two funny big-nosed faces grew out of the shadows which flitted across the wall. A forgotten memory of childhood touched me like a muted string. "And here's a cow with horns"—that was Mother speaking. I was lying in my cot, and Mother was sitting beside me, holding her hands up to the wall and laughing because I was looking at her hands instead of at the wall. "And here's bearded Billy Goat..." My eyes were wet, but I did not wipe the tears away-it was too cold to take your hands out of all those blankets, overcoats and the old fox fur.

"Just my rotten luck—I had to meet him on that train! I could have killed him easily. Several corpses were carried out of the trucks every day and no one would have been surprised if that airman, who was so miserable that he wanted to shoot himself, had been found one morning with a bullet through his head. But I couldn't kill him," Romashov shouted, "I couldn't because it would have been you, and not him, who would have been found in the morning with a bullet in your head! I realised this when he asked one of the girls what her name was and she answered 'Katya'. His face lighted up. I realised what a paltry, petty figure I was in contrast to him, with my thoughts about the happiness I was to win through his death. And I decided to do everything I could to save him for you. And now you dare to accuse me of having killed him! No." Romashov said solemnly, "I swear by the mother that bore me for this life of pain and misery! I swear by what I hold most sacred—my love for you. If he has died, I am not guilty of his death either in word or deed."

He started to do up his sheepskin coat but couldn't get the hooks into the eyes, his hands were trembling so.

If only I could have believed him, if only I could have dared believe him again! I gazed dispassionately at that gaunt face with the sunken eyes, at the yellow matted hair falling over his forehead, and the ugly patch of plaster which disfigured and tightened his cheek.

"Go away!"

"You're not feeling well, let me stay."

"Go away."

I don't know whether he had ever cried before, but his face now was wet with tears as, sinking on his knees, he buried it in the bedclothes, his body shaken with smothered sobs. "Sanya is alive," came the sudden thought, and my heart leapt with joy. "Unless this man standing on his knees before me is not human, but a fiend? No, no. It's impossible, unthinkable, that anyone can dissemble like that."

"Go away."

I don't know where I expected him to go. He had been living with us for nearly a month now—Rosalia having registered him for some reason as a resident. It was night time, too, and an alert was on. But he went out, and I was left alone.

"Tick-tock" went the metronome. I remember someone telling me that it was only in Leningrad that they broadcast the sound of a metronome during an alert. The window-panes shook together with the yellow tongue of the "blinker" standing on the table. What had really happened out there, in the wet little aspen wood?

Lying under the heap of sheepskins and blankets, I did not hear the all-clear. Almost immediately, it was followed by another alert. "Tick-tock" the metronome started again. "Believe-not believe".

It was my heart beating and praying on a wintry night, in the starving city, in the tiny kitchen of a freezing house barely lit up by the yellow flame of an oil "blinker", which flickered feebly, battling with the shadows that crept out of the comers. May my love keep you alive! May my hope be yours. May it stand beside you,
look into your eyes, breathe life into your blanched lips! Press its face to the blood-stained bandages on your legs. Say: It is I, your Katya! I have come to you, wherever you may be. I am with you, whatever happens to you. That somebody else who tends you, supports you, gives you food and drink-is me, your own Katya. And should Death bend over your couch and should you have no strength left to fight him, only a tiny flicker of strength remaining in your heart-that, too, will be me, and I will save you.



PART EIGHT

TOLD BY SANYA GRIGORIEV

TO STRIVE. TO SEEK

CHAPTER ONE

HE

With an odd sense of powerlessness to convey the things I see, my mind drifts back to fragmentary scenes from the early days and weeks of the war. The old life had gone for good and its place was instantly taken by a quite different life, which took command of everything, of me and Katya, of all our thoughts, feelings and impressions. This different life was the war, and I would probably not have written about it merely because it was different, had it not been for the fact that what happened to me in the war was interwoven in such a surprising way with the affair of Captain Tatarinov and the *St. Maria*.

I see a large, dark room in a peasant cottage, a table dimly lit by a candle-end, and windows curtained off with ground-sheets. The door opens, and a man comes in, his tunic undone. He rummages about in the stove and eats hungrily. He is Grisha Trofimov. Another man gets up from the bunk and joins him at the table. He is Luri. I hear their quiet talk, which makes my heart beat slow and strong.

"Been over to Ladoga?"

Grisha nods and goes on eating.

"Well?"

"Nothing new."

"Been at Zvanka?"

He goes on eating. Says nothing. He's been over to Zvanka too.

The two Leningraders look into each other's faces. It is the first night of the Leningrad blockade.

I see the message-bag dropping over the side of my plane-that's the way we saved men who mistakenly believed that they were surrounded.

I see the first grave, which we decorated with dud shells laid out to look like iron flowers. We flew over them as low as we could when returning from missions.

The lake, too, appears before me-that same lake, in whose sleepy morning frame I had seen the last vision of the old life. Now it is sombre and sullen. The water, filled to the brim of its shores, glints dully, and grey-blue smoke creeps across the misted mirror of its surface. *The* forest is burning, set alight by the Germans.

In the evenings we come out of the dugout built into the hillside. Patrol boats lay hidden among the bushes. We race across the dark water amid spray and foam. Planes come out of the forest like huge sea birds. This is Lake L., our third and fourth base.

I see lots of things. But everything I see passes before me, as it were, against the backcloth of the map which unfolds every day beneath the wings of my plane-a map with the breaking lines in the front and the widening black wave of the German offensive.

Every day new pilots arrived, most of them from the Civil Air Fleet. With some of them I had worked together in the North, with others in the Far East. They were experienced. First and Second Class pilots, and three of them even "millionaires", that is, men who had notched up over a million kilometres, and it was amusing to watch the comical blunders these civilians made in the process of becoming fighting flyers. We talked about this very often, both in the canteen and at home, in the dugout, where the three of us lived together -I, Luri and mechanic. Perhaps the reason we talked about it so often was because we had tacitly agreed not to talk about "other things". The newspapers did that for us.

In September my crew and I were ordered to report for duty to the Air Force Command of the Southern Front.

It was just an ordinary fight as air fights go, and I do not intend to describe it, the more so as it was very soon over. We succeeded right away in bringing down one of the Messers—he crashed in the very act of making a stall-turn. The two others hoicked and got in each other's way as they tried to settle on our tail. It was smart of them but not smart enough; we were not the kind to let someone get in behind us. They tried it once, but it didn't work. Then they came in again and very nearly got caught in our gun sights. To cut a long story short, we kept them at bay until they gave up and I headed straight for the front-line, which was not far off.

This was easier said than done, what with a quarter of my port wing shot away and the tanks being holed. I was wounded in the leg and in the face, and the blood was running into my eyes.

I suddenly felt strangely weak. It was at that moment, I believe, that I recalled the fearful dreams of childhood in which I was being killed or drowned-and the joyous sense of relief when you wake up to find yourself alive.

"But now"—the thought was a very calm one—"now I won't wake up."

I must have lost consciousness, but not for long, because I came to at the sound of my own voice. It was as though I had started to speak before I had regained consciousness. I ordered the crew to bale out. The radio operator-gunner complied immediately, but Luri grumbled:

"Oh, all right!", as though I were suggesting some tiresome jaunt to which he reluctantly agreed in deference to me.

The hardest thing was to fight this mist which made my eyes close and my arms go limp and helpless. Only once in a thousand years, it seemed, did I manage to fight it off and become aware that something, something most important, had to be put right immediately. A thousand years—and only a moment in which to regain control of my machine, struggling only with my left hand. Another thousand—and far below me I saw the Junkers, two Junkers, lumbering towards me like large, heavy bulls. This was the end, of course. And they took their time about it—1 saw that at a glance.

Luri baled out, and they started shooting at him. Killed, I suppose. Then they came back and drew alongside me.

What did that German look like? Was he handsome or ugly, old or young? Who cares. This was no soldier flying alongside me, but a murderer.

I don't know how to explain it, but it seemed to me that I saw both him and myself as from a distance. Myself, clutching at the controls with feeble hands, the blood streaming down my face, in a plane that was falling to pieces. And he, goggles raised, studying me with cold curiosity and a sense of his complete power over me. I may have said something to Luri, forgetting that he had baled out and they had probably killed him. The German passed under me, and the wing with the yellow cross on it appeared on my left. I pulled the stick over, trod on the pedal and hurled myself at that wing.

I don't know where the blow struck-probably on the cockpit, because the German didn't even open his parachute. I had killed him outright. Was I happy!

I found myself in the grip of an overwhelming, glorious feeling. To live! To live! I was wounded, I knew that they had got me, but no, my one thought was—to live! I saw the earth—it was quite close now— the plough field and the white dusty road.

Some part of me was burning-my jacket and my boots, but I felt no heat. Incredibly, I somehow managed to flatten out just above ground-level. I undid the straps-it was the last thing I managed to do that day, that week, that month, those four months... But let us not forestall events.

CHAPTER TWO

ALL WE COULD

I was very thirsty, and all the way to the village I kept asking for a drink and about Luri. When we got to the village I was given a bucket of water, and I couldn't understand what made the women cry when I put my head into the bucket and began to drink, seeing and hearing nothing

around me. My face was singed, my hair matted, my leg crippled and I had two gaping wounds in my back. I must have been a sight. A blissful feeling stole through my body, waxing bigger and stronger. I was lying on some hay in a farmyard, by the wall of a barn, and it seemed to me that this feeling came from the prickly touch of the grass, from the scent of the hay, from the earth, where no one could kill me. I had been carted down, and the old white horse was now tied to a paling a little way off, and the tears gathered in my eyes at this sense of bliss, at the happiness I felt looking at that horse. We had done all we could, I thought. I wasn't worried about the radio operator-gunner and the aerial gunner. I only asked them not to move me from here until they had all turned up-Luri was alive, too, I thought happily, he must be, seeing how lucky we had been in beating them off. He was alive and I would soon see him.

I did. The horse snorted and shied when they brought him in, and an austere old woman-the only person whom I remember-went up to it and punched it on the nose.

His face was serene and quite untouched, but for a scratched cheek, caused, no doubt, by the parachute dragging him along when he landed. His eyes were open. At first I couldn't understand why all the men took their hats off when he was laid on the ground. The old woman knelt beside him and began to arrange his arms...

Afterwards I was jolting along in a cart on my way to the casualty clearing station. Some other woman now, not a countrywoman, was holding my hand, feeling my pulse and repeating: "Careful, careful."

I was wondering, "Why careful? Am I dying then?" I must have said it aloud, for the woman smiled and answered: "You'll live."

And again the cart jolted along, bumping. My head was lying in somebody's lap, I saw Luri lying near the doorstep with dead, folded arms, and I tried to go to him, but they held me back.

CHAPTER THREE

"IS THAT YOU, OWL?"

We travelled in railway trucks, and there were only two passenger coaches in front. I must have been in a bad way if that little doctor with the intelligent harassed face ordered me after Ms first round to be transferred to one of those coaches. I was swathed in bandages-my head, chest and leg-and lay motionless like a fat white doll. Orderlies were talking outside our window on the station platform: "Get some of it from the dangerous car." I was a dangerous case. Something was beating inside me, I couldn't make out whether it was in my head or heart. It seemed to me that this was life beating and stirring in me, busy building something with hands which were tenacious, though still weak.

Only a few days had passed since I had looked out from my plane on what no other combatant in this war, I thought, had ever seen. Our

retreat had appeared to me in terms of algebraic formulas as it were, but now these formulas had been translated into real living facts.

I was no longer viewing our retreat from a height of eighteen thousand feet. I was retreating myself now, tormented by my wounds, my thirst, the heat, and not least by the dismal thoughts, which were as persistent as those blue, hard flies which settled on my bandages with revoltingly loud buzzings.

Evening was drawing in, and evidently we were no longer standing still, because my "cradle" was swinging rhythmically in time with the carriage's movement. The setting sun glanced through the window and the dusty, heavy air laden with the smell of iodine could clearly be seen in its slanting rays. Somebody was moaning in a low but harrowing manner, or rather droning monotonously through clenched teeth like a buzzer. Where had I heard that dreary voice before? And why was I trying so hard to remember where I had heard it?

Then suddenly school desks ranged themselves in rows before me and, as in a waking dream, I saw a lot of lively laughing children's faces. The lesson was an interesting one-about the manners and customs of the Chukchi people. But who cared about the lesson when a bet had been made and a ginger boy with wide-set eyes was holding my finger and coolly sawing it with a penknife?

"Romashka!" I said aloud.

The droning stopped.

"Is that you, Owl?"

He took a long time threading his way under the suspended cots and between the wounded lying on the floor until he emerged at last amidst protruding bandaged legs.

"What is it?" he said guardedly, looking straight at me without recognising me.

I thought he looked a little more human, though he was still "no oil painting", as Aunt Dasha would have said. At any rate, the lordly manner he had lately assumed was now gone. He was scrawny and pale, his ears stuck out like Petrushka's and his left eye squinted warily.

"Don't you recognise me?"

"No."

"Try again."

He had never been able really to conceal his feelings, and I could now read them in the order, or rather disorder, in which they appeared. Bewilderment. Dismay. Horror, which made Ms lips quiver. Then again bewilderment. Disappointment.

"But you were killed, weren't you?" he mumbled.

CHAPTER FOUR

OLD SCORES

The Destiny theme figures largely in old Russian songs, and though I am no fatalist, the word came to my mind despite myself when I read a

report of my own death in the newspaper *Red Falcons*. I remember it word for word:

"While returning from a mission the aircraft piloted by Captain Grigoriev was overtaken by four enemy fighter planes. In the unequal combat Grigoriev shot down one lighter and put the other to flight. Though his machine was damaged, Grigoriev flew on. Not far from the front-line he was attacked again, this time by two Junkers. Grigoriev, his machine in flames, rammed one of the Junkers. The men of the X air unit will forever cherish the memory of their brave comrades, Captain Grigoriev, Navigator Luri, Radio Operator-Gunner Karpenko and Aerial Gunner Yershov, who fought for the country to their last breath."

What happened was this: A war correspondent came to the village -1 learned of this only in the summer of 1943-soon after I had been removed from there. The farmers had witnessed the air fight and he questioned them about it. He photographed the wreckage of the burnt-out aircraft. He was told that I was in a hopeless condition.

Whether it was because I had escaped death by nothing short of a miracle, or because it was the first time in my life that I had occasion to read my own obituary, but this report had the effect of an insult on me. My thoughts ran off at a tangent. I pictured Katya-not the Katya, who, as I knew, would suddenly wake up and wander about the room, thinking of me, but a different Katya, a sad and aged one, who, upon reading this report, would put the newspaper down on the table, and go on doing things for a while as though nothing had happened, perhaps plaiting or letting down her hair with a stony face, and then suddenly topple over like a doll.

"Ah, well," I said. "These things happen."

And I crushed the newspaper and flung it out of the window. Romashov gasped. While we were talking the train had been standing. Afterwards he picked up the paper-apparently it gave him pleasure at least to read that I was dead, now that he had seen evidence to the contrary.

"So you're alive! I can't believe it! My dear chap!"

That was what he said-"dear chap".

"Christ, am I glad! Is it just a coincidence? Somebody with the same name? But what does it matter! The thing is you're alive."

He began to ask me where I had been hit, whether badly, whether any bones were broken, and so on. I disappointed him again, saying that I was wounded lightly and a doctor of my acquaintance had fixed me up in this passenger coach.

"I can imagine how upset Katya will be," he said. "She may have read this report."

I said, "Yes, she may," and began to ask him about Moscow. Romashov mentioned in passing that it was less than a month since he had left Moscow.

I daresay I ought to have given him to understand straight away that nothing had changed between us instead of talking to him in such a peaceful way. But man is a strange animal-that's stale news. I looked at his strained, unnaturally pale face, and nothing stirred in me beyond habitual contempt mixed with a faint interest. Needless to say, he was to me the same cad he had always been. But at that moment I thought of him as a familiar cad of long standing, one who sort of "belonged".

And he realised it; he realised everything. He began to talk about Korablev; did I know that the old fellow, despite his sixty-three years, had joined the People's Guard and this had been reported in a Moscow evening papers? He spoke about Nikolai Antonich, saying (with a touch of irony) that he had received not only a new flat but an academic degree. That of Doctor of Geography. And without presenting a thesis, mind you. To Romashov's mind it was almost impossible.

"And d'you know who made his career for him?" Romashov added viciously, with a gleam in his eye. "You." "Me?"

"Yes. He's a Tatarinov, and you've made that name famous." He meant that it was my studies of the *St. Maria* expedition that first drew attention to the person of Captain Tatarinov and that Nikolai Antonich had cashed in on this, seeing that he bore the same name. In all justice to Romashov I must say that he expressed this thought most succinctly.

This, however, was the last subject I wanted to discuss with him. He understood and switched the conversation.

"Do you know who I met on the Leningrad front?" he said. "Lieutenant Pavlov." "Who's he?"

"I like that!. He says he knows you since a child. A big broad-shouldered chap."

How was I to guess that this big, broad-shouldered chap was that boy Volodya with the baby-blue eyes, who wrote poetry and took me for sled rides behind his dogs Buska and Toga. "His father came to see him, an old doctor." "Ivan Ivanovich!"

It gave me pleasure, even from Romashov's lips, to hear that Ivan Ivanovich was well and was even serving in the Navy. There was a man for you!

Romashov mentioned several times that he had been on the Leningrad front. Katya had stayed in Leningrad and I was worried about her. But I just couldn't see myself asking Romashov about Katya!

By this time, now more or less reconciled to the fact that I was alive, he was all eagerness to talk about himself. He was already proud, I think, that he had met me on a hospital train, that he, too, was wounded, and so forth.

The war had found him in Leningrad, manager of the supplies department of one of the institutes of the Academy of Sciences. Though listed as reserved occupation he declined to take advantage of this, all the more so as the whole institute to a man had joined the People's Guard. Wounded near Leningrad, he had remained in the ranks. His former chief, now a high-ranking army man, had summoned him to Moscow. He was given a new assignment, but did not reach destination. His train was bombed near Vinnitsa. The blast had hurled him against a telegraph pole, and since then the whole of his left side gave him "terrible pains" from time to time.

"I was moaning in my sleep, you know, when you heard me," he explained. "And the doctors just don't know what to do about it."

"Now own up," I said sternly, "how much of this you have invented and how much of it is true?"

"It's the absolute truth, every word of it!"

"Is that so?"

"I swear it is! Those days are past when we had to play the fox with each other."

He said "we" and "each other".

"That's all over now, old chap. I have my life to live, you have yours. What is there to come between us now? You won't believe me again, but honestly, I'm amazed sometimes when I remember what it was we quarrelled over. Compared with what is happening now before our eyes it's so trivial."

"I should say it is!"

"Let's be done with it!"

He looked at me questioningly. Evidently he was not sure whether I would accept the offer.

But I did. Nothing could be further from my mind these days than the old scores of ours. I felt sick at heart, pitiable and helpless as I was with my crippled leg in face of the gigantic Shadow that was advancing on our country and was even now pursuing us, gaining on our lost train. At other times I would imagine life in a hospital, and day dragging endlessly, monotonously, the nurse coming in soft-footed and placing flowers on the bedside table, and God knows how I longed with all my heart and all my strength for anything but this peace and quiet, these flowers on the table, that noiseless hospital tread!

Or else there came to me a chilling thought, more dreadful than anything I could think of, the thought: "I shall never fly again." I would go hot over and start to breathe through an open mouth, and my heart would sink, sink so low that I never believed it would rise again.

CHAPTER FIVE

IN THE ASPEN WOOD

I lay by the window, with my back to the engine. The receding countryside opened out before me, and I did not see the three tanks until we had passed them. Nothing out of the ordinary, just three tanks. The tankmen were looking at us from their open hatches. They had no helmets on, so we took them for our own men. Then the hatches were closed down and that was the last moment when we could still believe that no able-bodied men were capable of gunning a hospital train carrying no fewer than a thousand wounded.

The carriages clashed with a metallic grating sound, and I was flung forward violently.. A groan escaped me as my weight fell on my wounded leg. A young fellow, with a clatter of crutches, dashed, yelling, down the carriage. Somebody knocked him down and he slumped in a corner beside me. Through the window I saw the first of the wounded, who had jumped out of the trucks, running and falling as the tanks sprayed them with shrapnel.

The man lying next to me, also an airman by the name of Simakov, looked out of the window too. His face was white when, turning away from the window, we looked into each other's eyes.

"We must get out!"

"I suppose so," I said. "All you need for that is a pair of legs."

Nevertheless, we managed somehow to crawl out of our berths and the rush of wounded men swept us out onto the platform at the end of the carriage.

I shall never forget the feeling that gripped me with such scorching intensity when, stifling the agonising pain, I descended the steps and crawled under the carriage. It was a feeling of contempt and even hatred for myself such as I had never experienced in my life before. Men lay all round me with arms thrown out in queer attitudes. They were corpses. Others ran and dropped with a cry, while I was sitting under the carriage, helpless, tormented with fury and pain.

I drew my pistol, but not to shoot myself, though the idea may have flitted through my mind together with the thousands of thoughts that swilled back and forth in it. Someone grasped my wrist.

It was one of the nurses. Her name was Katya. I pointed to Simakov, who was lying a little way off, his cheek pressed to the ground. She glanced at him and shook her head.

He was dead.

"Hell, I'm not going anywhere!" I said to the second girl, who had suddenly appeared from nowhere. She was remarkably unhurried amid the din and turmoil. "Leave me alone! I've got a pistol, they won't take me alive."

But the girls grabbed me and the three of us rolled down the embankment. I caught a momentary glimpse of Romashov ahead of me, crawling along on *his* belly, yellow, looking like a Chinese. He was crawling along the same ditch as we were; a muddy, clayey ditch running parallel with the track. The embankment ran into a marsh.

It was hard on the girls, and I asked them several times to leave me. Katya, I believe, shouted to Romashov, asking him to stop and help us, but he just looked back and went on crawling forward on all fours like a monkey.

That's how it was, except that it happened a thousand times more slowly than I am telling it.

We managed with difficulty to get across the marsh and lay down in a small aspen wood. "We" were the girls, myself, Romashov and two soldiers who had joined us on the way. They were slightly wounded, one in the right arm, the other in the left.

I sent the two soldiers out to reconnoitre and they came back reporting that there were as many as forty vehicles in various directions and some field-kitchens had even appeared. Apparently the tanks which had gunned our train were part of a large force that had broken through.

"We can get away, of course. But since the captain can't walk, we'd better make use of the railcar."

They had found a railcar under the embankment by a switch-track.

I remember it was while discussing whether the railcar could be raised and placed on the track that Romashov lay down on his back, groaning and complaining of the bad pain. He may really have had an attack, because when the girls undid his tunic we saw that the left side of his body was all red. Until then I had never heard of such contusions. Anyway, in such a state he obviously couldn't go to the switch-track with the soldiers. The girls went instead, just as unhurried and resolute, carrying on a leisurely conversation in their low, melodious Ukrainian voices.

Romashov and I were left alone in the little, wet aspen wood.

Was he feigning or was he really feeling bad? I wasn't quite sure. Several times he twitched like an epileptic, then bleated and fell silent.

"Romashov!" I said.

He lay on his back, his chest arched high, with a perfectly white, dead-looking nose. I called him again, and he answered in such a feeble voice as though he had already departed this life and was now returning with great reluctance to this aspen wood in an area where a German tank force was operating.

"Pretty bad this time!" he muttered, attempting a smile.

He raised his eyelids and stood up with difficulty, mechanically removing the aspen leaves that had stuck to his face.

I find it hard to give an account of that day, possibly because, despite the predicament we were in, it was rather dull, especially compared with the events of next morning. We waited and waited without an end. I lay on a heap of last year's leaves beside a scattered wood-stack. Romashov sat Turkish-fashion, with his legs tucked under him, and who knows what he was thinking, with those bird-like eyes half-closed and his hands resting on *his* bony knees.

The wood was damp and a recent rain had left large drops on the branches and spiders' webs, which quivered under the weight. The glittering raindrops fell to the ground with a plop. At least, we did not suffer from thirst.

Once or twice the sun peeped out at us. At first it was on our right, then, having described a semi-circle, it appeared on our left. That meant that three hours had gone since the girls and the soldiers went off to fix up the railcar.

Before going away the one called Katya had put her knapsack under my head. Judging by the sound it gave off when I punched it up it must have contained rusks. Romashov started to whine that he was dying of hunger, but I silenced him sharply.

"They won't come back," he said nervously after a while. "They've deserted us."

He had recovered from his attack and started to saunter around at the risk of betraying our whereabouts, since the wood was a sparse one and all was open terrain as far as the track.

"It's your fault," he said, coming back and squatting down beside me. "You sent them all away. One of the girls should have stayed behind."

"As a hostage?"

"Yes, as a hostage. And now you can whistle for them. Catch them coming back for us! That railcar is worked by hand and it can only take four people in any case."

I must have been in a bad temper, for I drew my pistol and told Romashov I'd kill him if he didn't stop whining. He shut up. His ugly face twisted and it was all he could do to keep from blubbering.

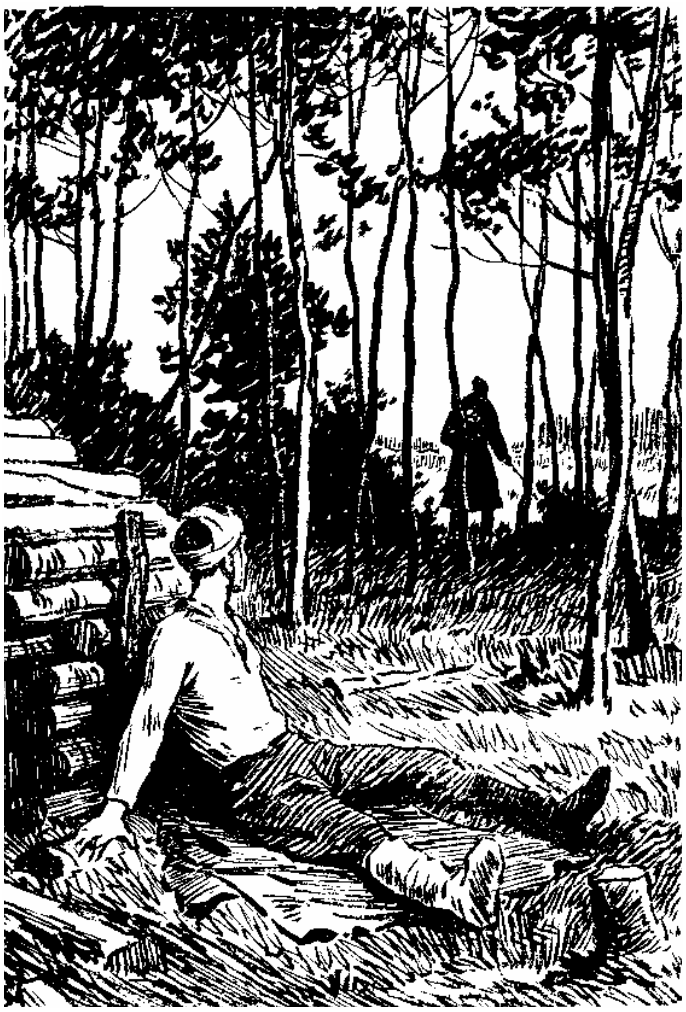
The outlook was pretty blue. Dusk was beginning to creep through the wood, but there was no sign of the girls. Of course, I never for a moment believed that they could go away in the railcar without us, as Romashov suspected.

Lying on my back, I looked up at the sky, which was darkening and receding from me among the thin, trembling aspens. I was not thinking of Katya, but something light and tender went through me. I felt: "Katya." It was half-dream, half-sleep, and but for Katya I would have driven it away, because I dare not sleep, I felt that I dare not, though I

couldn't yet say why. I dreamt of Spain or of the letter I had written from Spain-something very youthful and muddled, not about the fighting, but about the tiny orchards near Valencia, where the old women, when they learnt that we were Russians, did not know where to seat us, how to regale us. "Whatever happens," I had written to Katya, though I had felt her beside me, "remember that you are free, without any obligations."

I dreaded having to part with this dream, though my drenched leg felt cold and my greatcoat had slipped far down from my shoulders and was crumpled under me. I was holding Katya's hands, not letting go off my dream, but already something frightful had happened and I had to force myself awake.

I opened my eyes. A mist, lit up by the early rays of the sun, was drifting lazily among the trees. My face was wet and so were my hands. Romashov was sitting a little way off in the same pose of drowsy unconcern. Everything looked the same as before, but in fact everything was quite different.



He was not looking at me. Then he stole a glance at me out of the tail of his eye, and I understood at once why I was lying so uncomfortably.

He had pulled the knapsack with the rusks from under my head. What's more, he had taken my flask containing vodka and my pistol.

The blood rushed to my face. He had taken my pistol!

"Give me back my gun this minute, you fathead!" I said calmly.

He did not answer.

"D'you hear!"

"You'll die all the same," he said hastily. "You don't need a gun."

"Whether I'm going to die or not is my own business. You give me back my gun if you don't want to face a court martial. Get me?"

His breath was coming quick and short.

"Court martial!" he sneered. "We're alone and no one will know anything. As a matter of fact you've long been dead. Nobody knows that you're still alive."

He was staring me straight in the face now, and his eyes looked very queer-sort of solemn and wide-open. I wondered whether he had gone mad.

"I tell you what," I said calmly, "take a swig out of that flask and pull yourself together. Then we'll decide whether I'm alive or dead."

But Romashov was not listening.

"I've stayed behind to tell you that you've always been in my way everywhere. Every day, every hour of my life. I'm sick and tired of it! I've had a thousand years of you!"

Definitely, he was not quite normal at that moment. That last phrase of his spoke for itself.

"But that's all finished with now!" Romashov plunged on. "You would have died anyway, you've got gangrene. You'll die now all the quicker."

"That may be." There was not more than three paces between us. If I took good aim and threw my crutch at him I could stun him perhaps. My voice was still calm, though. "But why have you taken my map-case? My papers are in there."

"Why? To have them find you just as you are. Who? Unidentified. (He was omitting words). Just another corpse lying about.

You'll be a corpse," he said arrogantly, "and no one will know that I killed you."

Looking back, this scene is almost fantastic. But I have not altered or added a single thing.

CHAPTER SIX

NOBODY WILL KNOW

As a boy I was very quick-tempered and I remember what a dangerous sense of exhilaration came over me when I let myself go. It was with just this feeling, which had gone slightly to my head, that I found myself listening to Romashov. I had to keep perfectly calm, and I forced myself to do this, while my hand slid slowly behind my back and rested on my crutch.

"You may be interested to know that I've sent a letter off to my unit," I said in a steady voice, "so it's no use your relying on that report."

"What about the hospital train?"

He looked at me exultantly. He meant that the attack on the hospital train would easily explain my disappearance. At that moment I realised how long he had been wishing my death, ever since our schooldays perhaps.

"All right. But, strangely enough, you gain nothing by it," I said this, or words to this effect, just to gain time.

The wood stack prevented me from swinging my arm back. I had to move away from it unobserved and strike from the side to make sure of hitting his head.

"Whether I gain by it or not doesn't matter. You have lost anyway. I'll going to shoot you. There!"

He pulled out my pistol.

Had I believed him really capable of shooting me he might have found it in him to do so. I had never seen him so worked up. But I just spat in his face and said: "Shoot, damn you!"

My God, how he howled and twisted about, gnashing his teeth and even snapping! The sight would have been terrifying had I not known that behind these antics was only cowardice and bluster. A struggle with himself-whether to shoot or not-that was the meaning of his wild dance. The pistol burned his hand. He kept flourishing the gun at me and shivering, until I began to fear that he might press the trigger without meaning to.

"Damn you!" he shouted. "You've always tormented me! If only you knew to whom you owe your life, you rotter, you nobody! If only I could do it, my God! Why should you live, why? All the same they'll saw your leg off. You won't fly any more."

It may sound silly, but of all the idiotic curses he hurled at me one that struck home was his saying that I would never fly again.

"Anyone would think I was mostly in your way up in the air," I said. My voice had acquired a deadly quality, but I was trying to keep it calm. "But down on the ground we were Orestes and Pylades."

He was now standing sideways to me, covering his eyes with Ms left hand, as though despairing of persuading me to die of my own accord. It was a good opportunity, and I hurled my crutch. It had to be thrown like a spear, the body drawn hard back then flung forward with the arm thrown out. I did the best I could, but unfortunately I missed his head and struck his shoulder instead, not very hard.

Romashov was dumbfounded. He gave a great, clumsy jump, like a kangaroo. Then he faced me.

"You would, eh!" he said and swore. "All right!"

Leisurely, he packed the knapsacks, tied them together the easier to carry them and slipped one over each arm.

Just as unhurriedly, he walked round me, and bent down to pick up a twig. Waving it about, he made for the marsh, and five minutes later his stoop-shouldered figure could just barely be seen among the distant aspen trees. I sat leaning my hands on the ground, my mouth dry, fighting an impulse to cry out: "Romashov, come back!" as this, of course, was impossible.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ALONE

To leave me in the lurch, hungry, unarmed and badly wounded, within a stone's throw of the German detachment—this, I felt sure, had been carefully planned in advance. All the rest of Romashov's performance was done on the spur of the moment, probably in the hope of scaring and humiliating me. Having failed in this, he had gone away, and this was tantamount to, if not worse than, the murder from which he had flinched.

I could not say that this sobering thought made me feel any happier. I had to keep moving if I did not want Romashov's prophecy about my remaining in this little aspen wood for ever to prove true.

I stood up. The crutches were of different length. I took a step. It was not the sort of pain that hits you in the back of the head and knocks you out, but it was as though a thousand fiends were tearing my leg to pieces and lacerating the half-healed wounds on my back with iron scrapers. I took another step, then a third.

"Well," I said to the fiends.

I took a fourth step.

The sun stood fairly high in the sky by the time I reached the edge of the wood, beyond which lay the marsh, intersected by a single strip of wet, trampled grass. Green tussocks, like beautiful globes, were visible here and there, and I remembered how they had turned over under the girls' feet yesterday.

Some men were walking about on the embankment. I wondered who they were-our own or Germans. Our train was still burning; the flames, pale in the sunlight, licked the blackened walls of the trucks.

Should I go back to it? What for? The rolling thunder of gunfire reached me, muffled by distance, coming seemingly from the East. The nearest station along the line, some twenty kilometres distant, was Shchelya Novaya. Fighting was going on there, and this meant our troops were there. I directed my steps that way, if you could call that agony steps.

The wood came to an end, giving place to bushes of blue-black berries, the name of which I had forgotten. They looked like bilberries, only much bigger. A welcome sight, seeing that I had not had anything to eat since the day before. Something dark and motionless lay in the field beyond the bushes, probably a dead body, and every time I reached for a berry, leaning on my crutches, that dark object worried me. After a time I forgot about it, only to remember it again with a cold shiver. Several berries dropped into the grass. I lowered myself carefully to look for them, and a stab went through my heart—it was a woman. I made my way towards her as fast as I could.

She was lying on her back with outspread arms. It wasn't Katya, it was the other girl. She had been shot in the face, and her beautiful black eyebrows were drawn together in a look of suffering.

It was then, I believe, that I first noticed I was talking to myself, and saying rather odd things at that. I recollected the name of those blue-black berries that resembled bilberries-whortleberries they were called-and was overjoyed at the discovery. I began speculating aloud about

how this girl had been killed. Probably she had been going back to fetch me, and the Germans on the embankment had fired a burst at her from a submachine-gun. I said some kind words to her to buck her up, as though she were not dead, hopelessly dead, with those eyebrows drawn together in an expression of pain.

Then I forgot her. I hobbled along, babbling, and I didn't at all like the way I was babbling. This was delirium, it had crept upon me unawares and I did not even try to fight it because I needed every ounce of strength to fight an irresistible desire to fling away my crutches, which had blistered my armpits, and to lie down on the ground, where I would find peace and happiness.

I must have stopped seeing anything around me long before I lost consciousness, otherwise where could that fine pale-green head of cabbage have come from alongside my own head? I was lying in a vegetable garden gazing rapturously at the cabbage. Everything would have been fine if not for that scarecrow in the tattered black hat which wheeled slowly above me. The crow sitting on its shoulder circled with it, and I thought that but for that bird with the flat blinking eye everything in the world would be fine. I shouted at it, but my voice was so hoarse and feeble, that it just looked at me and stirred its wings, as though shrugging its shoulders.

Yes, everything would have been fine, if only I could stop the world from making those slow circles round me. I would then perhaps have been able to make out that unpainted log-built cottage at the top of the garden, with the porch, and that tall well-sweep in the yard. One of the windows kept darkening now and again. Somebody I couldn't see was walking about the house, looking anxiously out of the window.

I got to my feet. The doorstep was about forty paces from me-a trifle compared with the distance I had covered the previous day. But those forty steps cost me dear. I dropped exhausted on the porch amid a clatter of my crutches.

The door opened slightly. A boy of about twelve stood on his knee behind a stool. Lying on the porch, it was some time before I could make him out in the depths of the darkish room with its low ceiling and large double-tiered bunks screened off from the rest of the room by cotton curtains. He was aiming straight at me, one eye screwed up and the butt pressed to his cheek.

"Look, I need help," I said, trying to stop the room, which was also spinning round me in that slow accursed manner. "I'm a wounded airman from the hospital train."

"Kirill, stop!" said the boy with the gun. "He's one of ours."

He appeared to become duplicated at that moment. Another boy exactly like him peeped out from behind the curtains. He had a hunting knife in his hand. He was still puffing and blinking with excitement.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE BOYS

I hardly remember what happened afterwards. The days I spent with the boys are wreathed, as it were, in clouds of vapour. It was real vapour, too, coming from a big kettle that boiled from morning till night on a trivet in the Russian stove. But there was also another, visionary vapour, which made my breathing rapid and hoarse and left me in a drenching sweat. Sometimes it would clear a little, and then I would see myself in bed with a mound of coloured pillows under my leg. The boys had done that to keep the flow of blood away from the wound. I knew already that their names were Kirill and Vladimir, that they were the sons of a pointsman named Ion Leskov and that their father had gone to the station and told them to lock the door and let nobody in. They were twins, and though I knew it, I got scared every time I saw them together. They were so exactly alike that I thought I was being delirious again.

It was as though two selves were struggling within me—one a cheerful, blithe soul who tried to conjure up vivid memories of all the good things of life, the other a sombre and resentful person harbouring a grievance and brooding over his humiliation.

At times I saw a tall bearded man, so still with cold that he could not even shut the door behind him, coming into the cottage where my sister and I were living. It wasn't Doctor Ivan Ivanovich though. It was myself. I dropped exhausted on the porch steps, the door was flung open, boys aimed a gun at me, then said: "He's one of ours."

And I kept thinking that the reason they were so kind to me was because once, many years ago, my sister and I-lonely, neglected children in a remote, snowbound village-had helped the doctor.

At other times I saw myself with teeth bared in hatred, gun in hand, crouching under a railway carriage. People lay all round me in queer attitudes, with arms flung out. What had I done, what sin of omission was I guilty of? What important thing, the most important thing in life, had I overlooked? How had it happened that these men had come to us and dared to shoot down wounded men, as though there were no justice in this world, no honour, none of the things I had been taught at school, and learned to respect and love ever since a child?

I tried to answer this question, but I couldn't, because I was fighting for breath, and the boys looked at me anxiously and kept saying that if their father came he would know what to do to make me feel better.

The father did come. There could be no doubt it was he—the same ungainly figure as the boys, the same sombre face and shining blue eyes. They were shining at the moment when, with arms hanging down his sides and back bent, he stopped beside my bed.

"The German detachment has been routed," he said. "We surrounded them at Shchelya Novaya and mopped them all up to a man."

Then he gazed at me silently with a frown, and I thought that I must be in a bad way indeed if people looked at me with such kindly eyes, asked me my full name and rank, and pinned the slip of paper with these details to the wall so as not to lose it. There was no harm in that, though; let him do it; I didn't have to look at that paper. I took the man's hand and started earnestly to tell him what a reception his boys had given me. I may have been spinning it out too long, repeating myself and getting confused, because he put something cold on my forehead and said I was to go to sleep.

I knew that he would be pleased if I did, so I closed my eyes and pretended to be asleep. But the picture I had been describing to him

remained-somewhere in an interminable perspective, between wide-spaced walls.

Thousands of little houses loomed before me. Thousands of boys knelt behind stools on which lay thousands of guns. Thousands of other boys hid behind curtains, knife in hand. From horizon to horizon, in every house, in the depth of dark rooms, boys were lying in wait for the enemy, waiting to kill him as he entered.

CHAPTER NINE

DEALING WITH LOVE

If, like the poets, one compares life to a road, it can be said that at the sharpest turns in this road I have always encountered traffic-regulators, who showed me the right direction. This particular turn in the road differed from the others merely in fact that I was helped out by a pointsman, that is, by a professional traffic-regulator.

I lay in his house for two days and nights, now coming to myself, now losing consciousness, always opening my eyes to the sight of that sombre man standing by my bed, never moving away, as though to keep me from taking the turn where the road drops away into the abyss. Sometimes he turned into a boy with the same amazingly bright eyes, and the boy, too, stood steadfast at his post and kept me there in that room with the little windows and the low ceiling, away from the place where (if the report in *Red Falcons* was to be believed) I had already gone to.

The remarkable thing was that never, either awake or in delirium, did I think of Romashov. Could that have been an instinct of self-preservation? Probably it was-the memory of it would not have done me any good.

But when traffic was restored, when the family took me to Zaozorye by railcar-no doubt the very one which the nurses had failed to reach-and three pairs of shining blue eyes shyly took leave of me, when I found myself in another hospital train, this time a real one with a bathroom, a radio and a library; when, bathed, rebandaged and fed, with my leg hitched to the ceiling according to all the rules of medical science, I had slept my way through the whole of Central Russia, to find myself somewhere beyond Kirov in a strange world of unblacked-out windows-it was then that I remembered and went in my mind over everything that had occurred between me and Romashov.

I recollected our talk on the evening before the German tanks had gunned our train.

"Admit that you have committed some base actions in your life," I had said. "Base from your own point of view, I mean."

"Maybe," he had said coolly. "But what do you call a base action? I regard life as a game. Even now, for instance. Hasn't fate itself put the cards in our hands?"

It was the war, not fate, that had dealt the cards. Not the war either, but the retreat. If not for the retreat he would never have dared to steal my gun and papers from me and leave me in the wood alone.

I went over the whole history of our relationship, a very complicated one, bearing in mind (a thing now almost fantastic) that he had once seriously contemplated marrying Katya.

Was he reconciled to the fact that he had lost her for ever? I don't know. He had married somebody by the name of Alevtina Sergeyevna, and Nina Kapitonovna said that he had got terribly drunk at the wedding and had wept. Katya had listened to the story with a blush. Did she guess, then, that Romashov still loved her? I don't know, I don't know...

I had written to Katya while still in the train, and I wrote to her from the hospital almost every day. I wrote to the Berensteins' address, and to Pyotr through the field post, and to the Military Medical Academy where Katya was working with Varya Trofimova, as she had written to me in September. There was no railway communication with Leningrad, but the mail was delivered by plane, and I could not understand why my letters did not reach them. I comforted myself with the thought that if anything had happened to Katya somebody was sure to answer me.

That unhappy day, February 21, 1942, will always stick in my memory. One of the volunteer nurses told me that she had met a train from Leningrad at the station with trade-school pupils who were being evacuated from the starving city. She was a stern-faced woman who had mentioned one day, with a calmness that astonished me, that her husband and son had been killed at the front. Yet when she told me about the boys, so weak from dystrophy that they had to be carried out of the carriages, she wept.

I had to force myself to eat my dinner that day. My leg, which had been in a plaster cast for over a month now, had suddenly begun to give me an excruciating pain. The doctor ordered an X-ray, and that was when I "let it get me", as Aunt Dasha was fond of saying.

For one thing, the X-ray showed that the leg had knitted wrong and would have to be removed from the plaster and have some bones or other broken. That meant starting the treatment all over again. Secondly, it was devilishly cold in the X-ray room and I was kept there for an hour and a half. I must have caught a cold, because towards the evening I noticed that I was talking nonsense—a first sign with me that I was running a temperature.

In short, I contracted pneumonia. This meant putting off the second operation, and the doctors feared that I would be left lame.

I am afraid I am making too much of my ailments—dull stuff, especially considering that I had been wounded in the third month of the war without having done anything worth mentioning. And that at a time when the "miracle at the gates of Moscow", as the foreign newspapers headlined it, had already been accomplished; when for two hundred miles west of Moscow stiff legs clad in ridiculous ersatz *valenki* stuck out from every snowdrift. That at a time when work was in full swing on the build-up of a long-range naval air force-without me, who had spent fifteen years crisscrossing the skies over the sea in all directions? I even had a feeling as though the war mentality were wearing off, submerged in the senseless trivialities of hospital life.

CHAPTER TEN

THE VERDICT

I had always thought of a medical board as a sort of tribunal, one at which I had always had to plead guilty of not having been created a tall, broad-shouldered man with a square jaw and muscles capable of lifting a hundred and fifty pounds. It was with this unpleasant feeling that I found myself standing utterly naked before the medical board at M—v. I did knee-bends, shut my eyes and stretched my arms out in front of me, careful not to let them tremble, performed leg jerks and recognised the smallest letters at a great distance with faultless accuracy. Then an old, grey-haired lady doctor listened to my heart. There was something in my chest she didn't quite like, judging by the way she paused, frowned, then tapped me over again, as though practising scales on a piano. Then she said: "Breathe in, breathe out, hold it!"

It wasn't my lungs that had been worrying me when I went before the board. Whenever I got nervous I started to limp on my wounded leg, and this was a nuisance. It set me thinking how my leg would behave during a combat flight. I had always had sound lungs, though I had contracted the Spanish flu and afterwards had severe pleurisy as a boy. But it was my lungs that seemed to make an unfavourable impression on this grumpy old medical officer. She tapped me all over, turned me round and tapped again, then made me lie down, seemingly determined to prove at all costs that I was ill, ill, ill... That I was unfit and would never fly again.

Nearly six months had passed since I had hidden this horrible thought away somewhere deep down within me—hidden it and covered it up with any old thing. But it had not died or left me, it was merely lurking somewhere along with another anxious thought-about Katya.

And now, as I stood naked before the board, with scars from my wounds on my legs and back, I could no longer hide this thought either from myself or from others. The doctor must have read this in my eyes, because, picking up her pen, she hesitated to write down her decision, and passed me over to the chairman of the medical board, a short, stout doctor in horn-rimmed spectacles, who started tapping me vigorously on the ribs and shoulder blades with a little hammer instead of his fingers. The hammer gave off sounds now clear, now dulled, as though asking: "Aren't you ill, ill, ill? Unfit, and will never fly again?"

"There's nothing to worry about, Captain," the doctor said after a glance at my face as he stuck the rubber tubes into his big hairy ears. "You'll be all right after a little treatment."

He made a note in my case papers and repeated in a kindly tone: "You'll be all right.

" But he put me down for six months' leave, and I knew how bad one had to be for a medical board to give such an opinion of a combatant officer in the year 1942.

I whistled softly, not to attract the attention of passers-by, as I walked down the tree-lined street leading to the Kama. On the wall of the town's best building housing the flying school I read for the thousandth time the marble plaque, which said: "Popov, the inventor of radio and eminent Russian scientist, went to school here."

I climbed, limping, to the top of the high bank, and the Kama, still turbid, yellow-grey from the spring spate, spread before me with its wharves and steamboats, hauling huge barges, with its whistles and shouts resounding over the broad expanse of water.

The sight of a group of boys on the bank reminded me of the time Katya and I had visited Ensk after my return from Spain. The boys in Ensk had followed me about, doing everything that I did. When I had stopped to buy some cigarettes at a kiosk, they, too, had stopped and bought the same cigarettes. I felt like taking a dip. Leaving Katya in Cathedral Gardens, I went down to the river, undressed and dived in. They, too, undressed a little way off and plunged into the water just as I had done. No wonder—here was an airman who had fought in Spain and come home with the Order of the Red Banner pinned to his chest! And now?

My fingers shook slightly as I rolled myself a cigarette. Lighting up, I stood for a while motionless on the bank, taking in the unfamiliar sights and varied activities of the great river. A grey passenger steamer went past. I read its name: *Lyapidevsky*. "You didn't become a Lyapidevsky," I thought. "Nor a Kamanin either," when I read the name on the side of a similar small steamer that passed by. Farther out, by a wharf, lay the *Mazuruk* and I couldn't help smiling at the thought that all the vessels of the Kama Steamship Line bore the names of famous airmen, good friends of mine too. "*(These are the names of pilots who took part in the rescue of the Chelyuskin expedition in 1934. —Tr.)*

Anyway, there was nothing to prevent me now from flying to Leningrad, in order to find my wife or reassure myself that I had riot lost her forever.

I waited three weeks for a plane. Whether it was because I had got used to the idea of being ill, or because hope had crept stealthily into my heart, whispering assurance that all would come right yet, but little by little I recovered from the shock and put my thoughts and feelings in order.

It was not myself I was thinking of now, but of Katya. I thought of her when I heard "Nina's Romance" on the radio-she had liked it. I thought of her when seeing a show put on by the wounded. We had so seldom gone to shows! I thought of her when everybody was asleep in the vast ward, and only here and there could be heard an occasional moan or quick, hoarse mutterings.

A major of my acquaintance, who had flown to M—v on some mission from Leningrad front HQ, readily agreed to take me back with him.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I LOOK FOR KATYA

I had been grounded now for over six months. How can I convey the feeling with which I took the air again? It was galling to think that for the first time in my life I was flying as a passenger. Over the years I had become accustomed to feeling more at home in the air than on the ground. I looked out of the window with pleasure, as if checking whether any harm had come to this vast countryside with its black spring fields, its bright, winding streams and the dark-green velvet of its forests. It was with pleasure that I went into the cockpit, feeling its familiar, ordered compactness with my whole body. With pleasure I waited to see how the pilot would steer clear of the storm-we ran into one over Cherepovets, a magnificent mass of thunderclouds resembling palaces, with walls riven by lightning. I was reminded of my impressions of first flights, before the sky had become for me simply an air route.

At the airport in Leningrad I got a lift in a car that had come down for *Pravda* matrixes. It took me as far as Liteiny Prospekt. From there I would have to walk or take a tram. The only tram running to the Petrogradskaya was a No. 3, but the Leningraders who had settled themselves round the tram stop in a home-like way, said that I should have to wait perhaps an hour. The major, who had to get to the Petrogradskaya too, tried to persuade me to wait, seeing that I had a heavy knapsack—I had brought some food for Katya. But how could I wait, when I had to catch my breath at least twenty times at the mere thought that Katya and I were at last together in the same city, that at this very moment, perhaps, she was-I don't know what-waiting for me, sick, dying?

I flew headlong down the avenue running alongside the Summer Garden. I saw everything, took it all in—the allotments on Mars Field, with camouflaged anti-aircraft guns in the middle of them; the riotous greenery, which had never looked so lush in Leningrad before;
the general clean and tidy appearance of the city—I had read in /the papers that in the spring of 1942 three hundred thousand Leningraders had turned out to clean up their city. But everything I saw turned to me a single side-where was Katya, would I find her? I thought I never would, seeing that nearly all the houses had no window-panes in them and the houses stood silent, sad-eyed. I never would, seeing that every wall was dented and smashed by artillery shells. Yes, I *would* find her, seeing that even the square round the Suvorov monument was planted with carrots and beetroot, and the young shoots stood erect as though no better natural conditions for them could be thought of. I came out on the Neva and involuntarily my eyes sought the admiralty spire—I don't know how to explain it, but it was part of Katya-the fact that it was slightly dulled, like an old engraving. We had not been able to say goodbye to each other when the war started, but another leave-taking, the one before I left for Spain, came back to me so vividly that I almost saw her physically, standing in the dark hall of the Berensteins' flat among the old coats and jackets. How could I bring all that back again? To clasp her in my arms again? To hear her ask: "Sanya, is that you? Can it be you?"

From afar I saw the house in which the Berensteins lived. It still stood there, and strange to say it looked more beautiful than before. The window-panes were intact, and the facade threw back a resplendent gleam like that of fresh paint in the sunshine. But the closer I got to it the more was I disturbed by this strange immobility and spruceness.

Another ten, fifteen, twenty paces-and something gripped my heart, then let go, and it began to race wildly. There was no house. The facade had been painted on large sheets of plywood.

All that long summer day the distant roar of the artillery pounded in my ears like surf beating on a pebbly beach.

All day long I searched for Katya.

A woman with a triangular green face whom I met outside the wrecked house sent me to Doctor Ovanesyan, who was a member of the District Soviet. This old Armenian, a grey-black genial man with a three day's stubble, sat in the office of the former Elite Cinema, now the district HQ of the Civil Defence. I asked him whether he knew Ekaterina Tatarinova-Grigorieva. He said, "Sure I did. I even offered her a job as a nurse when the war started."

"Well?"

"She refused and went out to do trench-digging," the doctor said. "I never saw her again, I regret to say."

"Maybe you know Rosalia Berenstein, too, Doctor?"

He looked at me with his kind old eyes, and pursed his lips.

"Are you a relative others?"

"No, just a friend."

"I see."

He was silent for a while.

"She was a fine woman," he sighed. "We sent her to the hospital, but it was too late. She died."

I went back to the courtyard of the wrecked house. The facade had collapsed, but the side of the building facing the yard was intact. I found myself aimlessly mounting the debris-cluttered staircase. I got as far as the first landing. Higher up was a jumble of iron rods and beams hanging over the gaping staircase well and only at the second floor level did the stairs begin again.

In this house there had once lived my sister, whom I loved. Here we had celebrated her wedding. I had come here every Sunday, an air cadet in blue uniform, who dreamt of great discoveries. Here Katya and I had stayed whenever we came to Leningrad, and whenever we came we were received here as the nearest and dearest of friends. In this house Katya had lived for more than a year when I was fighting in Spain. In this house she had lived during the blockade, suffering hunger and cold, working and helping others, bestowing upon them the light of her clean, brave spirit. Where was she? Terror gripped my throat. I clenched my teeth to still the quivering of my body.

At that moment I heard the voice of a child, and in a gap in the wall overhead there appeared a boy of about twelve, dark-complexioned, with high cheekbones.

"Who do you want, Comrade Officer?"

"Do you live here?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"Of course not. With my mother."

"Is your mother at home just now?"

"Yes."

He showed me how to go up-at one spot there was a narrow plank bridging a gap in the staircase-and within a few minutes I was talking to

his mother, a tired-looking woman-a Tatar, as I realised the moment she spoke. She was the yardwoman of House No. 79. To be sure, she knew Rosalia and Katya well.

"When Nine was hit she go dig," she said, speaking of Katya. The boy, who spoke good Russian, explained that "Nine" was the house where the food store had been. "She dug man out, him friend. Ginger man. He lived her flat."

"She dug out a friend of hers," the boy quickly translated. "Afterwards he lived in her flat."

"Second old lady die. Hakim go bury him."

"The second old lady was Rosalia's sister," the boy explained. "Hakim's me. When she died we took her down to the cemetery. The ginger one was there too. He hired us for the job. Military man, too-a major."

I now had to ask about Katya. I steeled myself and did so. With an angry shake of the head the yardwoman said that she herself had been laid up in hospital for three months. "I call for mullah, no mullah in Leningrad, all mullah die." And when she returned home Rosalia's flat was already empty.

"Must ask house management," she said on second thoughts. "But him die too. Maybe she go away? She dig out ginger man, he have bread. Big sack, carry himself, not let me. I say to him: 'You greedy fool. We save your life. Don't think about bag, pray to God, read Koran.' "

Katya was not living at Rosalia's when the bomb hit the house— that was all she knew. I spoke to a number of other women. They wept as they told me how Katya had helped them. Hakim brought his pals, and they complained that the ginger major had promised them three hundred grams per head for the burial, but had "diddled" them by giving them only two hundred.

Who the devil could that ginger major be? Pyotr? But Pyotr wasn't a major, and it was impossible to imagine him doing starving boys out of a hundred grams of bread. Ah, well, whoever the man was, he had helped Rosalia bury her sister. Who knows but that he may have helped Katya in her need. She had been at the funeral with him, and evidently could not have been so weak if she had managed to walk all the way to the cemetery. Since then, however, no one had seen her, either alive or dead.

It was past five when, tired out and with a splitting headache, I started for the Military Medical Academy. The Academy itself had been evacuated, but the clinics, turned into hospitals from the first day of the war, still remained. The Stomatology Department, where Katya worked, was still there. I was sent to the office, where an elderly typist, who somehow reminded me of Aunt Dasha, said that Katya had been in a bad way and Doctor Trofimova had arranged for her to be evacuated from Leningrad.

"Where to?"

"That I can't say. I don't know."

"Is Doctor Trofimova herself in Leningrad?"

"As soon as she sent your wife off she went to the front," the typist said. "Since then we've had no news from either of them."

CHAPTER TWELVE

I MEET HYDROGRAPHER R.

I realised now that it had been naive of me to write to Katya in the course of six months without getting a word in answer, and then expect that I only had to turn up in Leningrad for her to meet me on her doorstep with outstretched arms. As if there had not been that cruel hungry winter of nineteen forty one, with its trainloads of dying children and special hospitals for Leningraders in cities throughout the land. As if there had not been those sickly faces with the clouded eyes. As if the rumble of gunfire could not still be heard in the city coming now from the East, now from the West.

I was thinking of this as I sat in the office of the Stomatology Clinic, listening to the typist's story of the young sailor, the spit image of her own son killed in the war, who had suddenly come and given her three hundred grams of bread when she no longer had the strength to rise from her bed.

"You'll find Katerina all right," she said. "She dreamt of a flying eagle. Your husband, I told her. She wouldn't believe me. Now, wasn't I right? I'm telling you now, too-you'll find her."

Maybe. She was dying while I had been living in clover in M-v, I thought, staring dully at this old woman, who was trying to convince me that I would find Katya, that she would come back to me. "I was taken care of and nursed. And she didn't have the hundred grams of bread to pay the boys with for burying Bertha." With despair and fury I thought that I should have flown to Leningrad in January, I should have insisted, demanded that they discharge me from hospital. Who knows-I might have come out then in better shape than I was now, and could have found and saved my Katya.

But it was too late in the day now to have regrets about things that could no longer be mended. "I'm no worse off than anybody else," Katya had written from Leningrad. Only now did I realise what those simple words meant.

The old woman, who had probably been through much more than I had, kept trying to comfort me. I asked her for some boiling water and treated her to some pork fat and onions-things that were still scarce in Leningrad.

From then on a chill lodged in my heart. No matter what I was thinking or doing, always the question "Katya?" obtruded itself.

While at M-v I had conned over the telephone numbers of nearly all my Leningrad acquaintances. But none of those I rang up from the clinic answered the call. The ringing seemed to be lost in the mysterious emptiness of Leningrad. I tried the last number in my memorised list, the only one I was not sure of. I held the receiver to my ear for a long time, listening to some far-off rustling sounds, and behind them, still fainter impatient voices.

"Hullo," suddenly came a deep masculine voice.

"Can I speak to-"
I gave the name.
"Speaking."
"This is Air Pilot Grigoriev."
Silence.
"Not Alexander Grigoriev, surely?"
"Yes."
"Would you believe it! My dear Alexander Ivanovich, I've been racking my brains these three days where to look for you."

About six years ago, when the Tatarinov search expedition was decided upon and I was engaged in organising it, Professor V. had introduced to me a naval man, a hydrographer, who taught at the Frunze School. We had spent only one evening together in Leningrad, but I was often to recall that man, who had painted for me with such remarkable clarity a picture of the future world war.

He had come late. Katya was asleep, curled up in an armchair. I wanted to wake her, but he would not let me, and we had a drink with some olives for a snack; Katya always had a stock of olives.

He was deeply interested in the North. He was sure that the North, with its inexhaustible resources of strategic raw materials, would be called upon to play a very important part in the coming war. He regarded the Northern Sea Route as a naval highway and declared that the Russo-Japanese campaign had gone wrong because of the failure to grasp this idea, which had been put forward by Mendeleyev. He had urged that naval bases should be set up along all convoy routes.

I remember that, at the time, this idea struck me as extremely sensible. I appreciated it anew on June 14, 1942, a few days before I flew to Leningrad, when, sitting on the bank of the Kama, I heard the far-off voice of the radio announcer reading out the text of the treaty between Great Britain and the Soviet Union. It was not difficult to guess what the lines of communication mentioned in this treaty were, and my thoughts went back to that "nocturnal visitor", as Katya had later called the hydrographer.

I had run into him several times between 1936 and 1940 and read his articles and his book *Soviet Arctic Seas,* which became famous and was translated into all European languages. I followed his career with interest, as he, I believe, followed mine. I knew that he had left the Frunze School and was in command of a hydrographic vessel and then served at the Hydrographical Department of the People's Commissariat of the Navy. Shortly before the war he took his doctor's degree; I remember reading the announcement about his thesis in a Moscow evening paper. I shall call him R.

It was a rare occasion—"it happens once in a thousand years", as R. put it-my finding him at home. The flat was sealed and he had unsealed it and come in only a couple of minutes before I phoned, and that only because he was leaving Leningrad for long. "Where are you going?"

"A long way away. Come over, I'll tell you all about it. Where are you staying?"
"I haven't fixed up yet."
"Very good. I'll be waiting for you."

He lived near Liteiny Bridge in a new block. It was a spacious flat, rather neglected since the war, of course, but with something poetic about it, like the home of an artist. It may have been the tastefully fashioned dolls standing under glass covers on the piano that suggested this idea to me, or the multitude of books on the floor and the shelves, or perhaps the host himself, who received me without ceremony in his shirt-sleeves, the open neck of his shirt revealing a full, hairy chest. I had seen a portrait like that somewhere of Shevchenko. But R. was no poet, he was a rear-admiral, as his service coat hanging on the back of a chair testified.

He first of all asked me where I had been and what I had been doing with myself during the year of war.

"Yes, you've had a run of bad luck," he said when I told him about my misfortunes. "But you'll make up for it. How come you were with the Baltic Fleet, then the Black Sea Fleet? Deserted the North, I see? I always took you for an enthusiast of the North-for good and all."

It was too long a story to tell him how I had come to "desert" the North. I merely said that I had left the Civil Aviation only when I had given up hope of returning to the North.

I became lost in thought and started out of my reverie when R. addressed me.

"You'd better lie down and get some sleep," he said. "You're tired. We'll talk tomorrow."

Ignoring my protests, he brought in a pillow, removed the holsters from the divan, and made me lie down. I fell asleep instantly, just as though somebody had tiptoed up to me and thrown a thick, heavy blanket over all that had happened that day.

It was still very early, probably round about four o'clock, when I opened my eyes. R. was already up, curtaining off his bookshelves with old newspapers. For some reason the thought that he was going away that day depressed me. He sat down beside me, but did not allow me to get up. Screwing up his quick, black eyes and rumpling his thinning hair, he began talking.

Nowadays every schoolboy knows, if only roughly, what was happening on the seaways from Britain and America to the Soviet Union in the summer of 1942. But at that time, in the summer of 1942, the things R. was telling me were news even to me, though I had never stopped taking an interest in the North and pounced on every item that appeared in the press concerning the operations of the Air Army of the Northern Fleet.

Very briefly, but in far greater detail than even in special articles I was subsequently to read, he painted for me a picture of the big war that was being waged in the Barents Sea. I listened raptly to the story of the daring raid by midget submarines into the Gulf of Petsamo, the enemy's major naval base; of Safonov, who had shot down into the sea twenty-five enemy aircraft; of the work of the airmen, who attacked transports under cover of snow blasts-I hadn't forgotten yet what a snow blast was. Listening to him, I experienced for the first time in my life a galling sense of frustration. The North R. was telling me about was *my* North!

From him I first learned what a "convoy" was. He pointed out to me on the map the possible "rendezvous points", that is, the secretly arranged spots where the British and American ships were to meet, and explained the manner in which they passed under the protection of our Navy.

"This is the way they go," he said, showing me, in a general way, of course, the route, which at that time, in 1942, was not usually talked about. "A column of from one to two hundred ships. You can guess, of course, at what spot they will run into difficulties?" And he pointed out approximately where that spot was. "But never mind the western route. We have men here with good heads on their shoulders" (he pointed out the place). "There's another matter, no less important. These gates, which the Germans are trying to close," he said briskly, covering the outlet from the Barents Sea into the Kara Sea with his hand, "because they understand perfectly well how important the X. mines are for aircraft engine industry. And, of course, they don't like the idea of our having so valuable a means of transit as the Northern Sea Route, especially as they were already hoping this spring-"

He did not finish the sentence, but I understood what he meant. I happened to have heard that the Germans had succeeded in seriously damaging a port which was of great importance for the western route.

"You can imagine how far the war has spread," R. went on, "if not so long ago a German submarine fired on our aircraft off Novaya Zemlya. But that's not the whole story. Today I'm flying to Moscow in a plane which the Military Council of the Northern Fleet has sent for me. The pilot. Major Katyakin, tells me he has been hunting a German surface raider for two weeks—and where would you think? In the area—" He named a remote area. "In short, the war is already being fought in places where only hydrographers and polar bears used to roam. This is where they remembered me," R. said, laughing. "Not only remembered me, but also-" here his face assumed a kindly, jovial expression-"also given me a most interesting and important job. .1 can't tell you anything about it, of course, it's a military secret. But I can tell you that you were the first person I thought of. Your phoning me up the way you did was a miracle. Alexander Ivanovich," he wound up gravely, even solemnly, "I propose that you fly with me to the North."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

DECISION

He went away, and I was left all alone in the empty abandoned flat. All four spacious rooms were at my disposal, and I could wander about them, thinking as much as I liked. R. would be coming back at three in the afternoon when I was to tell him one short word: "Yes". Or another still shorter: "No".

Between these two words stretched a long, hard road, and I plodded along it, resting and plodding along again, and there was no end to it.

The Germans were shelling the district. The first ranging-in shrapnel shell had burst long since, and the cloud of smoke, dispersing slowly, still hung over Liteiny Bridge. The explosions, starting at a distance, began to draw nearer, advancing from right to left, striding savagely between the blocks straight towards this house, towards the empty rooms where I was wandering between "yes" and "no", which were so infinitely far apart.

It was probably the nursery. A black, one-eyed teddy bear sat on top of the cupboard with dropping head; in a corner lay a scooter, and on a low round table stood various collections and games, and I pictured to myself a small version of R., just as energetic and full of the same controlled ardour as the senior, with the same droll Cossack's forelock and round face. In this room I rested from my "yes" and "no". Here I could even think of the home which Katya and I had once planned to set up in Leningrad. For where there is a home there are children.

The shell bursts drew nearer and nearer. One exploded quite close, flinging open the doors and bringing a cheery tinkle of splintered glass. In the ensuing silence footsteps echoed hollowly in the street. I looked out of the window and saw two boys, with what looked to me like ghastly faces, running towards the house. When they drew level one of the boys touched the other on the back and with a loud laugh, turned and ran back again. They were playing tag.

R. would be coming back at three and I would say to him: "Yes".

It would be as though those six months of frustrating idleness had never been. I would go to the North. The farther away from me it had been all those years, the closer and more alluring it had grown. Had I not fought as best I could in the West and the South? But up there, in the North-that was where I had to be, defending a land which I knew and loved.

Then suddenly I stopped still and said to myself: "Katya."

To go away and leave her? To go far away, for a long time? To make no attempt to find Pyotr, whose field post number may simply have been changed? To undertake no other search here, in Leningrad and at the Leningrad front? Wherever Katya might have been evacuated she was sure to try and join Nina Kapitonovna and little Pyotr. Was I to lose this trail I had picked up, faint though it was, but which might lead me to where she was, numb with grief because that damned newspaper report could not but have reached her?

My decision was made. I would stay in Leningrad for a few more days. I would find Katya, then go to the North.

R. returned at three o'clock. I told him of my decision. He heard me out and said that in my place he would have done the same. "But we must go to Moscow together. I'll arrange for you to be put on strength at Headquarters, and then Slepushkin will give you a fortnight's leave for family considerations. A wife after all. And what a wife! I remember Ekaterina Ivanovna very well. A sensible girl, kind-hearted, and talk about charming-one in a thousand!"

I shall not describe how, the next day, I went back to the Petrogradskaya and made another round of all the tenants of house No. 79; how, at the Academy of Arts, I tried to find out where Pyotr was, only to learn that he had been wounded and had been in the clearing hospital on Vasilyevsky Island. The sculptor Kostochkin had visited him, but that sculptor had died of starvation and Pyotr, rumour had it, had returned to the front. Or how I discovered why my letters had never reached the children's camp of the Artists' Union, which had been re-evacuated to a place near Novosibirsk; or how Doctor Ovanesyan went with me to the District Soviet and shouted at an indifferent fat man who declined to make any inquiries about Katya.

Evacuee trains in January had been routed to Yaroslavl, where special hospitals had been set up for Leningraders. This was the only solid fact I

had been able to establish, and it was the opinion of all the Leningraders I met that I must look for Katya in Yaroslavl.

Two circumstances combined to convince me that this was so. For one thing, the children's camp of the Artists' Union before its re-evacuation had been in the Yaroslavl region, in a village called Gniloi Yar. Secondly, Lukeria Ilyinichna, as the typist of the Stomatology Clinic was called, suddenly remembered that Doctor Trofimova had sent Katya to Yaroslavl.

"My God!" she said with vexation. "Fancy getting such a thing muddled up! My memory's gone weak, you know, it's because I don't have any sugar. I've remembered it though, sugar or no sugar. And I tell you-Yaroslavl's the place where you'll find her."

R.'s plane was leaving at midnight. I rang him up and arrived ten minutes before the take-off.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

FRIENDS WHO WERE NOT AT HOME

If my movements on that day were to be traced on the map of Moscow, one would think I had deliberately gone out of my way to avoid meeting any of those I was so keen on seeing. "Keen" is the word, though I wanted to see different people for quite different reasons. Both lots were in Moscow. Another glance at the map, perhaps, would reveal that their route that day ran alongside my own. Or crossed it two minutes later. Or ran parallel with mine along the next street, behind a narrow line of buildings. Be that as it may, my luck was out, and with one exception, I found no one at home and went straight from the airfield to Vorotnikovsky Street where Korablev lived, seeing that my luggage consisted of one small suitcase.

The tumbledown wooden annexe, lost amid the tall built-up houses, looked like a summer cottage, what with its shutters and its veranda. Korablev no longer had held the ground floor to himself, and though Moscow had struck me, at first sight as being oddly empty, here, in this little house, I found a head sticking out of nearly every window. Women were sitting round the doorsteps, knitting, and the moment I appeared I found at least a dozen pairs of eyes scrutinising me with curiosity. I might have been back at Ensk, in our old courtyard. ' "Who d'you want?" "Korablev."
"Ah, Ivan Pavlovich? Second door on the left down the corridor." "I know that," I said, mounting the steps. "Is he at home?" "Knock. I think he is."

The last time I saw Korablev was before the war. Katya and I had dropped in on the old man without warning, bringing a cake and a bottle of French wine. He was a long time shaving and talking to us from the next room, while we looked at some old school photographs.

At last he had come out, wearing a new suit with a starched collar, his moustache twisted up with a youthful swagger. That was how I saw him

as I walked down the dark corridor, just as he had been on that wonderful, memorable evening. In a moment he would come out and recognise me at once. "Is that you, Sanya?"

But I knocked two or three times at the familiar felt-padded door without getting an answer. Korablev was not at home.

"Dear Ivan Pavlovich," I wrote, moving aside because the women were watching me and I did not want them to see how agitated I was. "I don't know whether I'll have time to call again. I'm leaving for Yaroslavl today, where Katya was evacuated in January. I may travel still farther from there until I have found her. I can't in this note explain what happened to me and how we lost each other. Should you (or Valya, whom I hope to see today) happen to have heard anything of her, please let me know immediately at the following address: c/o Rear-Admiral R., Political Department, Polarnoye, the Arctic. Dear Ivan Pavlovich, in case you have read about my death, here I am writing to you, your Sanya."

A dozen hands reached out simultaneously for my letter. I took the Metro, which looked more beautiful and imposing than ever before, to the Palace of Soviets station. The war might have ended long ago, the way the old men sat about on Gogol Boulevard, leaning on their gnarled old sticks. Children were playing. Preoccupied with my own thoughts and cares, it suddenly dawned on me-why, this is Moscow, Moscow!

The brass plate on Valya's door read: "Professor Valentin Zhukov". Oho! A professor! I rang, knocked, then kicked the door.

There was nothing surprising in the fact that in the summer of 1942, when nearly all Moscow's inhabitants spent most of their lives ''a! work, I should not find Professor Zhukov at home during working hours. But the fact that Valya, my old pal Valya, was poking around somewhere when I needed him so badly, made me wild. I kicked the door again, and suddenly it yielded, as though alive, with a plaintive squeak. I pulled the handle, and the door opened.

The flat was empty, of course, and the faint hope that Valya might be asleep was dashed at once. I went into the "all-purpose kitchen", which had once served as both dining-room and nursery. Strange to say, the place had been tidied up. The table was covered with a cloth, and white paper with scalloped edges lay on the shelves. It looked as if a woman's hand had been over those clean-swept walls, over those windows with the fresh lilies-of-the-valley on the sills. Valya buying flowers? One would have to be a great artist to imagine such a scene. In another room a narrow iron cot stood against the wall and over the foot of it lay a neatly folded dress. Katya had once had a dress like that-white polka dots on a blue ground. What could a woman be doing in Valya's bachelor flat? Kiren and the children had gone away at the beginning of the war-I learnt that from Katya's first letters. "I wonder who's hooked you, old chap?" I recalled a letter of Katya's in which she poked fun at Kiren for being jealous of her husband, engrossed though he was in the study of cross-bred silver foxes. The cause of her jealousy was a "Zhenka Kolpakchi, who has eyes of different colour". It looked as if that Zhenka hadn't lost much time! Anyhow, I had not found Valya in.

"Dear old Valya," I wrote, "on my way to Yaroslavl, where I hope to find Katya or at least find out where she is, I dropped in on you but unfortunately did not find you in. I've had no news of Katya for the last six months. She corresponded with Kiren when she was in Leningrad, so maybe Kiren or you know something about her? I was wounded and was in hospital at M—v. I wrote to you but got no reply. I've been through a

lot, but how much easier it would have been if Katya and I had met, or at least if each of us knew that the other was alive. Write to me, care of Rear-Admiral R., Northern Fleet, Political Department, Polarnoye. This is a tentative address as I have no other yet. Keep well, dear friend. The door was open. You'll have to break it down now—at least that's better than leaving the flat open. I'll drop in again before I leave, if I can manage it."

I put this note on the kitchen table. Then I placed the door-hook in position so that it would drop into the eye when I shut the door, and I slammed the door. The hook fell straight into the eye.

I had one more important errand in that neighbourhood. Not far from Valya there lived a man whom I had to see, whether he relished the prospect of such a visit or not. This visit of mine was long overdue!

During my sleepless nights in hospital, tossing about in delirium, I had thought about this encounter. I needed it so much that I felt I had to keep alive until I had seen him!

I had often pictured to myself this meeting. I wanted to appear before him at some relaxed moment in his life, at the theatre, say, when the thought of me would be farthest from his mind. Or somewhere in a hotel, say, when I would lock the door and eye him with a smile. Sometimes, in the gloom of pre-dawn, I would see him on the bed next to mine, sitting his legs tucked under him and a look of strange indifference in his flat, half-closed eyes.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE. KATYA'S PORTRAIT

One day, as we were passing through Dogs' Place, Katya had remarked: "Romashov lives here." She had pointed to a grey-green building, which looked no different from its neighbours on either side. Yet both then and now I thought there was something indefinably mean about those peeling walls.

There was no list of tenants at the entrance, as before the war, and I had to go to the house-manager's office to find out the number of the flat.

And this is what took place in the office: the registration clerk, a dour, prim lady in pince-nez, started and looked at me with round eyes when I asked for Romashov. In a cubbyhole partitioned off with boards, men wearing aprons-evidently yardkeepers-sat and stood about. There was a slight stir among them too.

"Why don't you phone him," the clerk suggested. "His phone was connected yesterday."

"No, I'd rather call without phoning," I said, smiling. "A sort of surprise. You see, I'm an old friend of his whom he thinks dead."

Though this was a quite ordinary conversation, the clerk reacted with an oddly forced smile, and from the adjoining room there slowly

emerged a very cool and deliberate young man in a smart cap, who gave me a close look.

I had to go back into the street to get to the entrance, and at the street door I hesitated for a moment. I had no gun, and was thinking whether I ought not have a word with the militiaman standing on the corner. I dismissed the idea, however. "He won't get away," I thought.

I never for a moment doubted that he was in Moscow, probably not in the army. Even if he was in the army he would still be living in *his* flat. Or in a summer cottage. In the mornings he would walk about in *his* pyjamas. I could see him as large as life in Ms pyjamas, after a bath, with the yellow tufts of wet hair sticking up on his head. It was a vision that set purple circles spinning before my eyes. I had to compose myself, which meant thinking of something else. I recalled that at five o'clock R. would be waiting for me at the Hydrographical Department.

"Who's there?"

"May I speak to Romashov?"

"Call back in an hour."

"Couldn't I wait for him inside," I said very politely. "I shan't be able to call again, unfortunately. I'm afraid he'll be disappointed at not seeing me."

The door-chain clinked. It was not slipped off, though. On the contrary, it was being fastened, so that the person inside could have a peep at me through the slit. Then with another clink it was taken off. An old man in an unbuttoned shirt and baggy trousers held up by braces let me into the hallway. He stared at me suspiciously. There was something aristocratically haughty and at the same time pitiful about that weazened, hook-nosed face. A yellow-grey tuft of hair stuck up from his bald forehead. The skin hung over his Adam's apple in long folds, like stalactites.

"Von Vyshimirsky?" I said, wonderingly. He started. "I mean Vyshimirsky without the 'von'-you're Nikolai Ivanovich Vyshimirsky, aren't you?"

"What?"

"My dear Nikolai Ivanovich, don't you remember me?" I proceeded cheerfully. "I came to see you once."

He started breathing hard.

"I've had lots of people coming to see me, thousands," he answered sullenly. "As many as forty used to sit down at my table."

"You were working at the Moscow Drama Theatre and used to wear a jacket with brass buttons. My friend Grisha Faber played the red-haired doctor, and Korablev introduced us in Grisha's dressing-room."

I wonder why I felt so light-hearted? Here I was standing in Romashov's flat as though I were the master there. He would be here within an hour. I took a deep breath with half-open mouth. What would I do to him?

"I don't know! What name did you say?"

"Captain Grigoriev at your service. So you are living here now? In Romashov's Hat?"

Vyshimirsky glanced at me suspiciously.

"I live where I'm registered," he said. "Not here. And the house-manager knows I live there, and not here."

"I see."

I took out my cigarette-case, flipped open the lid and offered him a cigarette. He took one. The door leading into the next room was open. The place was clean and tidy, all light-grey and dark-grey-walls and furniture. A round table stood before a divan. And over the divan somebody's portrait, a large one in a smooth light-grey frame. "Everything to match," I thought.

"You mean Ivan Pavlovich, the teacher?" Vyshimirsky suddenly asked.

"Yes."

"Yes, of course, Korablev. A fine man. Valya was a pupil of his. Nyuta wasn't, she graduated from the Brzhozovskaya Girls' School. But Valya was a pupil of his. To be sure! He was a help, yes, he was..." And the glimmerings of a kindly feeling flitted across his bewhiskered old face.

Then, pretending to recollect himself, the old man invited me into the rooms-we had been standing all this time in the hallway-and even asked me whether I had just arrived in town.

"If you have," he said, "there's an army canteen where you can get quite a decent meal with bread for next to nothing on your travel warrant."

But I wasn't listening to his chatter. I had stopped in the doorway, astounded. That portrait over the divan in the light-grey frame was of Katya-a splendid portrait, which I had never seen before. It was a full-length photograph of Katya in the squirrel coat, which looked so nice on her and which she had made just before the war. I remember how hard she had been trying to get it done by some famous furrier named Manet, and was cross with me because I couldn't understand that the cap and the muff had to be made of fur too. What could this mean, my God?

At least a dozen thoughts jostled in my mind, one of them so absurd that the memory of it today makes me feel ashamed. I imagined almost everything except the truth, a truth which proved to be even more absurd than that absurd idea!

"I must say I never expected to meet you here, Nikolai Ivanovich," I said when the old man had told me how, after leaving the theatre, he had been employed at a mental hospital as a cloak-room attendant, and had been dismissed because the inmates had "unlawfully notified the matron that I stole soup and ate it at night".

"Are you working for Romashov? Or just keeping up the acquaintance?"

"Yes, keeping up the acquaintance. He suggested that I help him out in his business, and I agreed. I was employed as secretary to the Metropolitan Isidore, and I don't conceal the fact; on the contrary, I state the fact in my personnel questionnaires. It was a big job, an enormous task. Our daily mail alone was over fifteen hundred letters. The same here. But here I work as a favour. I get a worker's ration, because Romashov has fixed me up at his institution. And the institution knows I am working here."

"Isn't Romashov in the army now? When we last met he was in army uniform."

"No, he's not in the army. Reserved for the duration. Indispensable or something."

"What sort of mail are you getting?"

"Oh, business letters, very important," Vyshimirsky said. "Extremely important. We have an assignment. At the present moment we are

under instructions to find a certain woman, a lady. But I suspect it's not an assignment, but a private affair. A love affair, so to speak."

"What woman is it?"

"The daughter of an historic personage, a man I knew very well," Vyshimirsky said proudly. "You may have heard of him perhaps—Tatarinov? We are searching for his daughter. We'd have found her long ago, but it's such a frightful muddle. She's married and has a double name."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"YOU WON'T KILL ME"

It was as though life had suddenly pulled up sharply, jolting my head foremost into an imaginary wall. That was how I felt as I stared at the old man, just an ordinary old man, standing before me in an ordinary room and telling me that Romashov was looking for Katya, that is, doing the same thing I was doing.

Our conversation, however, proceeded as though nothing had happened. From Katya the old man switched over to some member of T.U. committee who had had no right to call him "a hangover from the old regime", because he, Vyshimirsky, had a work record ~of fifty years, then he wandered off into reminiscences, relating how in the old days, back in 1908, when he came out of the theatre the commissionaire would cry out: "Vyshimirsky's carriage! "-and the carriage would roll up. He wore a top hat and cloak in those days, but now people did not wear such things, which was "a great pity, because it was elegant".

"When did he die?" he suddenly asked.

"Who?"

"Korablev."

"Who said he died? He's alive and well," I said in a jocular tone, though I was quivering in all my being, thinking: "You'll know everything in a minute, but tread carefully."

"So it's a private affair you say? Concerning a lady?"

"Yes, private. But very serious, very. Captain Tatarinov is an historical personage. Mr Romashov was in Leningrad. He was there during the siege and starved so bad that he ate paste off the wallpaper. He tore down old wallpaper, and boiled and ate it. Afterwards he went on a meat foraging assignment, and when he came back she was no longer there. She'd been moved out."

"Where to?"

"That's just the question," Vyshimirsky said. "You know what that evacuation was like? Go and find anybody! It's not as if she'd been moved out by special train. You could trace it then. Take the Gold Storage Plant, for instance. Where did its train go? To Siberia? Then she'd be in Siberia. But she was evacuated by aeroplane."

"By aeroplane?"

"Yes, exactly. As a privileged person, I suppose. And now, who knows where she is? All we know is that the plane flew via Khvoinaya that is, the very place where Mr Romashov was getting meat."

I must have sensed instinctively when it was necessary to hold my tongue and when to put in two or three words. Everything was as it should be. Here was an army man, seemingly just out of hospital, thin and peaky, who had called on a friend with whom he had parted at the front, asking how his friend was getting on, what he was doing. "You'll know everything in a minute, step warily."

"Well? And did you find her?"

"Not yet. But we will," said Vyshimirsky, "following my plan. I wrote to Buguruslan and to the Central Inquiry Bureau, but that was useless. They sent us a dozen Tatarinovs and a hundred Grigorievs, and we don't know what name we have to give as her first. So then I wrote personally to the chairmen of the executive committees of all the regional cities. It was a big job, a big assignment. But Captain Tatarinov was a friend of mine and for his daughter's sake I spent three months writing and sending out a stereotype inquiry—will you please give necessary instructions—evacuation point—historical personality—awaiting your reply. And we received it."

There was a sharp ring at the door. "That's him," Vyshimirsky said.

A cowed look came into his face. The grey tuft of hair on top of his head started shaking and his moustache drooped. He went out into the hallway, while I took up a position against the wall beside the door, so that Romashov should not catch sight of me at once on coming in. He might jump out onto the landing, because Vyshimirsky said to him in the hallway: "Somebody to see you."

"Who?" he asked quickly.

"A man by the name of Grigoriev," the old man said.

He did not jump out, though he could have done-I bided my time. He stood in the dark corner between the wardrobe and the wall and he gave a scream when he saw me. Then he raised doubled fists and pressed them to his face, childlike. There was a key in the door. I turned it, took it out and slipped it into my pocket. Vyshimirsky was standing between us. I picked him up and set him aside like a dummy. Then, for some reason, I pushed him and he toppled mechanically into an armchair.

"Well, let's go and have a chat," I said to Romashov.

He was silent. He had a cap in his hand, and he stuffed it into his mouth and clamped his teeth down on it.

"Well!" I said again.

He shook his head violently.

"You're not going?"

"No!" he screamed.

The stark terror of despair that had seized him at the sight of me suddenly fell away from him. I wrenched his arm and he straightened up. When we entered the room only one eye of his still had a slight squint to it, but a complete change had come over his face, which was now composed and blank of expression.

"I'm alive as you see," I said quietly.

"So I see."

I could now have a good look at him. He was wearing a light grey suit with a yellow ribbon on the lapel-the insignia of a seriously wounded man, whereas he was only slightly shell-shocked. He had put on weight, and but for Ms protruding red ears, he had never looked such a presentable gentleman.

"The pistol."

I thought he would start lying about having handed it in when he was demobbed. But the pistol, with my name engraved on it, was a gift from my regimental commander for bombing the bridge over the Narova. If Romashov had handed it in he would have given himself away. That was why, without saying a word, he now pulled open a drawer of his desk and got it out. The gun was not loaded.

"The papers!"

He was silent.

"Well!"

"They got soaked and were ruined," he said hastily. "A bomb shelter in Leningrad was flooded. I was unconscious. Only C.'s photograph was intact. I gave it to Katya. I saved her."

"Really?"

"Yes, I saved her. That's why I'm not afraid. You won't kill me." "Won't I? Tell me everything, you skunk," I said seizing him by the collar, then letting him go at once when I felt the yielding softness of his throat.

"I gave her everything when she was starving. Ah, you don't believe me!" he cried in despair, sidling up to me to peer into my eyes. "But you will when you've heard me out. You don't know anything. I hate you."

"Is that so?"

"You've taken from me everything that was good in life. I could have made a go of it, yes I could," he said arrogantly. "I was always in luck, because the world's full of fools. I could have made a career. But I didn't give a damn for that!"

"I didn't give a damn for a career" was putting it pretty strong. From what I knew of him, Romashov had always been an unprincipled climber. He had succeeded admirably, considering that he had always been such a frightful dullard at school.

"So listen," Romashov said, growing still paler, if that were possible. "You'll believe me because I'm going to tell you everything. The Tatarinov search expedition-it was me who got it cancelled! At first I helped Katya because I was sure you were going alone. But she decided to .go with you, so I got the expedition cancelled. I sent in a letter, making a rather risky statement—it would have been all up with me if I hadn't been able to prove it. But I pulled it
off."

Some sheets of writing paper lay in a grey leather case bearing the initials "M.R." in gold. I drew out one sheet, and Romashov froze, Ms staring eyes directed to some spot above my head. It looked as if he was trying to peer ahead into his own future, to see what threat to himself that simple action of mine contained.

"Yes, write it down," he said, "this man who had the expedition stopped was eventually exiled and is dead. But write it down if it still matters to you."

"It doesn't mean anything to me," I answered coolly.

"I wrote that the idea of finding Captain Tatarinov, who had disappeared twenty years ago, was a mania with you, and that you always were unbalanced ever since your schooldays. But behind it all was an ulterior motive. You had married Captain Tatarinov's daughter and were raising all this fuss around his name in order to further your own career. I did not write this by myself."

"Trust you!"

"D'you remember that article 'In Defence of a Scientist'? Nikolai Antonich wrote that, and we referred to it in the letter."

"You mean in the denunciation."

I was now taking all this down as fast as I could.

"Yes, in the denunciation. And we had it all corroborated. I tricked Nina Kapitonovna into signing one paper, and my God, what a job it was to prevent them calling her out! You have no idea what harm this caused you! In the Civil Air Fleet, and I suppose also afterwards, when you were already in the army."

How can I convey the feeling with which I heard out this confession? I couldn't make out why he was coming clean. The simple calculation was soon to become clear to me though. It was like a light thrown in retrospect upon all the inexplicable things that had been happening to me and that I couldn't help thinking of wherever I was.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE SHADOW

"It all began a long time ago, when I was still at school," Romashov went on. "I had to sit up all night to be able to answer my lesson as well as you did. I tried not to think about money because I saw that money didn't mean anything to you. It was my ambition to become like you, to become you, and I fretted because you were always and in everything the better man."

With trembling fingers he drew a cigarette out of a glass box lying on the desk and looked round for a light. I struck my lighter. He lit up, inhaled and threw the cigarette away.

"Sometimes I used to meet you in the street, and I'd hide myself in doorways and then follow you like a shadow. I sat behind you in the theatre, and used to think, my God, in what way am I different from him? But I knew that what I saw on the stage was different, because I looked at everything with different eyes than yours. No, Katya was not the only bone of contention between us. Everything that I ever felt was always at war with what you felt. That's why I know everything about you. I know that you were working in agricultural aviation on the Volga, then in the Far East. You asked to be sent to the North again, but they refused you. So then you went to Spain-my God, it was as though everything I had striven for all those years was suddenly working out of itself. But you came back," Romashov shouted with loathing, "and from then on everything went well with you. You went to Ensk with Katya-

you see, I know everything, even things you have long forgotten. You could forget because you were happy, but I couldn't, because I was unhappy." He drew a shuddering breath and closed his eyes. Then he opened them again, and something very keen and sober, a world away from these passionate confessions, flickered in his quick glance. I listened to him in silence.

"Yes, I wanted to part you, because this love had given you such marvellous happiness all your life. I was sick with envy, thinking that you loved simply out of love, whereas my love had the extra spur in that I wanted to take her away from you. You may think it funny, my talking to you about love. But the contest is over, I have lost, and what is this humiliation to me now compared with the fact that you are alive and that fate had played a trick on me again?"

The telephone rang in the hall. Vyshimirsky answered it. "Yes, he's in. Who's that speaking?"

He did not call Romashov, however.

"Then the war broke out. I joined up. I didn't have to, I was reserved. If I was killed, all the better! But secretly I was hoping that you'd be killed. Near Vinnitsa I was lying in a barn when an airman came in and stopped in the doorway, reading a newspaper. 'What a fine bunch o' lads!' he said. 'A pity, they've gone up in smoke.' 'Who?' 'Captain Grigoriev and his crew.' I read that paragraph a thousand times. I learnt it by heart. A few days later I met you in the hospital train."

It was very odd, the way he was seeking my sympathy, as it were, for the fact that, contrary to his hopes, I was still alive. He was so carried away, however, that he did not see the absurdity of his attitude.

"You know the rest. Even in the train I was struck by the fact that you somehow didn't seem to be thinking about Katya. I saw that you were tormented by all the filth and confusion, but there again you were yourself, you would have given your life to prevent that retreat. For me it merely meant that you had shown yourself again to be the better man."

He fell silent. There might never have been that aspen wood, the heaps of wet leaves and the woodstack which prevented me from swinging my arm back, or myself lying on the ground, propped up on my hands, trying not to shout to him: "Come back, Romashov!"— as he sat there before me, a dignified gentleman in a light grey suit. The desire to strike him with my pistol was so great that my arms even began to ache.

"Yes, a profound thought," I said. "Incidentally, will you please sign this paper."

While he was confessing I had been writing a "deposition", that is, a brief history of how the search-party had been torpedoed. It was torture for me, as I am a poor hand at composing official papers. But I think I made a good showing with the "Deposition of M.V. Romashov", perhaps because it contained such phrases as: "Having basely deceived the leadership of the Northern Sea Route Administration" etc.

Romashov quickly glanced through the paper.

"All right," he muttered, "but first I must explain to you—"

"First, sign, you'll do your explaining afterwards."

"But you don't know-"

"Sign, you rat!" I said in such a voice that he recoiled in terror, and his teeth began to chatter in a sort of slow, reluctant manner.

He signed and flung the pen down with a savage gesture.

"You ought to be grateful to me, but instead you intend to take advantage of my frankness. Ah well!"

"Yes, I do!"

He looked at me. How deeply at that moment he must have regretted that he had not finished me off in the aspen wood!

"I returned to Moscow," he continued, "and immediately set about getting a transfer to Leningrad. I travelled by way of Lake Ladoga. The Germans were sinking our ships, but I made it, and just in time, thank God," he added hastily. "In another day, at most two days, I would have had to arrange her funeral."

This may have been the truth. When Vyshimirsky was telling me about Romashov having been in Leningrad, I recollected the story of the ginger major which the yardkeeper and her children had told me. "She dig out ginger man, he have bread. Big sack, carry himself, not let me." It was not this that worried me. Romashov might have talked Katya into believing that I had been killed-in battle, of course, and not in the aspen wood.

"And there I was in Leningrad. You can't imagine what it was. I got a bread ration of three hundred grams, and brought half of it to Katya. At the end of December I managed to get some glucose, and I bit all my fingers while I was taking it to Katya. I dropped beside her bed, and she said: 'Misha!' But I didn't have the strength to get up. I saved her," he repeated gloomily, as though the fearful thought that I might not believe him had struck him again. "And if I didn't die myself it was only because I knew that she and you needed me." "I too?" "Yes, you too. Skovorodnikov had written to her that you'd been killed. She was half-dead with grief when I arrived. You should have seen what happened to her when I told her I had seen you! I realised at that moment how pitiful!-Romashov brought this out in such a full, loud voice that there even came a thud from the hallway, as if Vyshimirsky had fallen off his chair-"how pitiful I was in the face of this love. At that moment I bitterly regretted having wanted to kill you. It was a false step. Your death would not have brought me happiness."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, that's all. In January they sent me to Khvoinaya. I was away a fortnight. I brought meat, but the flat was already empty. Varya Trofimova—I expect you know her—had sent Katya away by plane."

"Where to?"

"To Vologda—I found that out definitely. And from there to Yaroslavl." "Who did you make inquiries of at Yaroslavl?" "The evacuation centre. I know the man in charge." "Did you get a reply?"

"Yes. But it was only to say that she had passed through the evacuation centre and had been sent to a hospital for Leningraders."

"Show me."

He found the letter in his desk and handed it to me. "Vspolye Station," I read. "In reply to your inquiry..."

"Why Vspolye?"

"The evacuation centre is there. It's two kilometres outside Yaroslavl."

"Is that all now?" "Yes."

"Now listen to me, then," I said, fighting for self-control. "I can't forgive, or not forgive you, whatever you may have done for Katya. After what you did for me this is no longer a personal quarrel between us. You weren't quarrelling with me when you wanted to finish me off and left me, a badly wounded man, in the wood to die. You were committing a military offence, a dastardly crime for which you will be tried as a scoundrel who violated his oath."

I looked him squarely in the eye and was amazed. He was not listening to me. Somebody was coming up the stairs, two or three people judging by the footfalls which echoed hollowly on the staircase. Romashov looked about him uneasily and stood up. There came a knock at the door, then a ring.

"Shall I open?" Vyshimirsky asked from behind the partition.

"No!" Romashov shouted. "Ask who it is," he added quietly, as though collecting himself, and walked across the room with a light, almost dancing tread.

"Who's there?"

"It's from the house management, open the door."

Romashov gave a sharply indrawn breath.

"Tell them I'm not at home."

"I didn't know. Somebody phoned and I said you were at home."

"At home, of course," I said loudly.

Romashov threw himself upon me and seized my arms. I pushed him away. He squealed, then followed me out into the hallway and took up the same position as before, between the wall and the wardrobe.

"Just a minute," I said. "I'll open the door."

Two men came in—an elderly one, who was evidently the house manager, judging by the dour, businesslike expression of his face, and that same young man with the cool manner and the smart cap whom I had seen in the house manager's office. The young man first looked at me, then, unhurriedly, at Romashov.

"Citizen Romashov?"

"Yes." Vyshimirsky's teeth chattered so loudly that everyone looked round at him. "Weapons?" "I have none," Romashov answered, almost unruffled. Only a vein throbbed in his otherwise impassive face.

"Well, get your things together. Just a change of underwear. Accompany the prisoner, will you," he said to the house manager.

"Your documents, Captain."

"It's all nonsense, Nikolai Ivanovich!" Romashov was saying in a loud voice in the next room, where he was packing his knapsack. "I'll be back in a few days. It's that same stupid old business about the offal. Remember me telling you about it—the offal from Khvoinaya?" ' Vyshimirsky's teeth chattered again. It was obvious that he had never heard about that offal before.

"Sanya, I hope you find her in Yaroslavl," Romashov said louder.

"Tell her-"

Standing in the hall, I saw him drop the knapsack and stand for a while with closed eyes.

"Never mind," he muttered.

"Excuse me, may I ask you for a glass of water," the man in the cap said to Vyshimirsky.

Vyshimirsky gave it to him. Now we all stood in the hall—Romashov with his knapsack on his back, the house manager, who had not said a word throughout, and a bewildered Vyshimirsky with the
empty glass in his hand. For a minute or so all were silent. Then the young man pushed open the door.
"Goodbye, excuse me for disturbing you." And with a polite gesture he motioned Romashov forward.

Probably, if I had the time, I would have tried to discover some deep meaning in the fact that fate, working through a member of the Moscow C.I.D., has so abruptly interrupted my conversation with Romashov. But the Yaroslavl train was leaving at 8.20 and in the time left to me I had to:

(a) present myself to Slepushkin and complete all the personnel formalities besides, and that might take a good hour and a half;

(b) drop in at the Rewards Department—while still at M—v I had received notice that the award of my second Order of the Red Banner had been endorsed and I could receive the document at the People's Commissariat;

(c) get something to eat on the journey—nearly everything I had brought with me from M-v I had left with a fellow-airman of the Baltic Fleet in Leningrad;

(d) book my ticket, but this did not worry me much, as I would have gone without one.

What's more, I had to write to the military prosecutor about Romashov.

All this appeared to me absolutely necessary, that is, my life during the four or five hours before my train was due to leave, was to be rilled with these particular cares. But what I should have really done was simply to go back to Valya Zhukov, who was a few minutes' walk away, and then—who knows?—I might have found time to give some thought to that jumble of truth and lies with which Romashov had tried to put himself right with me.

I even paused in Arbat Square, in two minds whether to drop in for a minute on Valya or not. Instead, I went into a barber shop-I had to get shaved and change my collar before reporting to the Hydrographical Department, where one rear-admiral was going to introduce me to another.
At five o'clock sharp I presented myself to Slepushkin, and at six.

I was enlisted in the H.D. personnel for posting to the Far North at the disposal of R. Two or three years ago these laconic, formal words would have conjured up a distant scene of wild rolling hills lit up by the timid sun of a first Arctic day, but just now what with excitement and all these cares on my mind, I mechanically thrust the document into my pocket and walked out, thinking of my omission in not having asked R. to get in touch with Yaroslavl by military telegraph line.

I shall not dwell on the hour and a half that I lost in the Rewards Department and my other errands. But I must describe this last memorable encounter I had in Moscow.

Very tired, I went down into the Metro at Okhotny Ryad. It was the close of the working day, and although in the summer of 1942 there was still plenty of room in Moscow's Metro, there was a crowd at the top of escalator. As I peered into the faces of the Muscovites coming up on the moving belt towards me, it suddenly occurred to me that throughout that busy, tiring day I had seen nothing of Moscow. I noticed from afar a heavily-built man in a thick cap and an overcoat with broad square shoulders floating up towards me, waxing larger as he waited with an air of lofty toleration for that noisy machine to carry him to the top.

It was Nikolai Antonich.

Had he recognised me? I doubt it. Even if he had, of what interest to him was a little captain in a shabby tunic, with an ugly kitbag from which a hunk of bread stuck out?

His somnolent, imperious glance slid over my face incuriously.



PART NINE

TO FIND AND NOT TO YIELD

CHAPTER ONE

THIS IS NOT THE END YET

At the hotel in Yaroslavl there was a telegram waiting for me: "Leave immediately for Archangel. Lopatin." It was from the Hydro-graphical Department. But why not from Slepushkin with whom I had arranged that I would continue my search for Katya in the event of my not finding her in Yaroslavl? Who was this Lopatin? And why immediately? Why Archangel? True, Archangel was still the main base for any hydrological work along the Northern Sea Route. But hadn't R. told me that we were to meet at Polarnoye, where his plans would have to be endorsed by the Commander-in-Chief of the Northern Fleet?

All this was cleared up, and very soon too. But at the moment, there in Yaroslavl, in that squalid little hotel, where I raised the blue paper blind and read and reread the telegram, I felt nothing but vexation at this muddle and uncertainty, which seemed in some way to threaten Katya and deprive me of the hope of seeing her again soon.

I now had a short journey facing me—a mere thousand kilometres northward of Katya...

This is what I learnt when, straight from the train, I presented myself at the HQ of the White Sea Naval Flotilla: Lopatin, whom I had been cursing all the way, was Personnel Chief of the Hydro-graphical Department. Only now did I recollect having heard the name at the People's Commissariat. There had been no muddle in this telegram. The day I left Moscow events had occurred in the Far North which caused Rear-Admiral R. to leave urgently, at night, for Archangel, and the same night a wire had been sent to me. There was nothing now for either R. or me to do at Polarnoye, as the officer commanding the fleet had himself

gone to Archangel. His meeting with R. had taken place the day before. Evidently, the plan for that "most interesting job" had been approved, because immediately after this meeting R. flew out to Dickson. He must have been in a great hurry, or else decided he could manage without me, otherwise he would have left instructions for me at Flotilla HQ.

"You're late, Captain," The Flotilla Personnel Chief said to me. He was a genial, grey-headed man with side whiskers, who resembled an old sailor of the period of Sevastopol's first defence. "What am I to do with you now? We can't send you chasing after him."

He ordered me to report again in a few days time.

But how Archangel had changed, how unlike itself, while still itself, it had become.

American sailors strolled about the streets in their little caps, bell-bottomed trousers and woollen jumpers, fitting close round the waist and falling loosely over the trousers. British sailors, with the initials "H.M.S." on their caps, were somewhat more reserved in their manner, but they, too, had that easy-going air about them which distinguished them so strongly from our own sailors and struck me as strange. One encountered Black sailors at every step. Chinese, washing shirts in the Northern Dvina, right under the quay, and laying them out in the sun among the rocks, chattered loudly in their softly guttural tongue.

And the Dvina, so spacious, so Russian, that it seemed there could be no other river like it in the world, bore its brimming waters onward. Motor launches, cleaving the sparkling wave as with a knife, passed in one direction, towards the cargo port.

But it was not the foreigners who engaged my attention those days, though I regarded them with keen but detached curiosity. This was the city of Sedov and Pakhtusov. At the cemetery in Solombala I stood for a long time at the grave of "Lieutenant Pyotr Kuzmich Pakhtusov, Cavalier of the Corps of Navigators, who died at the age of 36 from the trials and tribulations sustained on his voyages". From here Captain Tatarinov had taken his white schooner on her long voyage. Here Navigating Officer Klimov, the only surviving member of the expedition to reach the mainland, had died in the town hospital. The *St. Maria* expedition had an entire section devoted to it in the local museum, and among the familiar exhibits I found something new and interesting-the recollections of artist P., a friend of Sedov's, describing how Klimov had been found on Cape Flora.

Early in the morning, after writing my regular letter to Yaroslavl, I found myself at a loose end and went down to Kuznechikha. The pine wood spread its sharp tang over the river. The drawbridge was open and a little steamboat, weaving its way among the endless timber rafts, was carrying people to the dock. Wherever you looked was wood, everything was wooden-the narrow sidewalks along the fronts of the squat old buildings dating from Nicholas I's time and now housing hospitals and schools, the road paving, and fantastic edifices built of stacks of fresh-sawn planks along the river banks. This was Solombala, and here I found the house in which Captain Tatarinov had lived in the summer of 1912 when the *St. Maria* was being fitted out.

He had descended the steps of that little log-house and walked through the front garden-tall, broad-shouldered, in his white naval jacket, with moustaches turned up in the old-fashioned way. With stiffly bent head, he had listened to some Demidov of a merchant, who

demanded money from him for salt junk or for the "preparation of ready-made clothing". And out there, in the cargo port, barely visible among the heavy merchantmen with side paddles, stood the slim and graceful schooner-too slim and graceful to make the voyage from Archangel to Vladivostok along the coast of Siberia.

One incident, insignificant in itself but important for me, brought these misty scenes oddly to life.

The day before a convoy had arrived I had gone to B. Port to see the foreign ships unload.

Oho, how big this ancient port had grown, how spacious! I must have walked a couple of kilometres along the wharves but still saw no end to the cranes, which were piling military and general cargoes in tall, rectangular stacks. And extensions were still being made to the port. I came to the end and stopped to take in the panorama of the wharves, which curved back in a smooth arc. At that very moment the little steamboat, puffing vigorously, steered clear of a big American vessel with a Hurricane in the bows and approached the wharf. I glanced at her name, *Lebedin,* and remember thinking that this pretty name had become sort of traditional in northern waters. It had been the name of the boat in which Tatarinov's friends and relations had gone out to his schooner to give the captain a last embrace and wish him a pleasant cruise and happy landfall. Could this be the same *Lebedin,* which had been called in one article "the first Russian icebreaker"? Surely not!

I asked a sailor who was rolling a barrel of fuel down the gangway to call his captain, and a minute later a ruddy-cheeked young fellow of about twenty-five, clad in ordinary work blues, came up on deck, wiping his hands, which were black with oil, on a rag.

"I have an historical question to ask you, Captain," I said. "Do you know by any chance whether this tug of yours was called *Lebedin* before the revolution as well?" "She was." "When was she launched?" "In 1907" "And always had the same name?" "Always."

I told him what it was about, and he surveyed his craft with an air of cool pride, as though he had never doubted that she would take her destined place in the history of the Russian fleet. It may sound rather funny, but the fact is that my encounter with the *Lebedin* cheered me up immensely. Although I had read the life of Captain Tatarinov, the last page of it still remained closed to me.

"This is not the end yet," that old tugboat with her ruddy-cheeked young skipper seemed to be saying to me. "Who knows, the time may yet come when you will succeed in turning that page and reading it."

On my third visit to the Personnel Officer I asked him to post me to a regiment, or, if that was impossible, to place me under the orders of the Northern Fleet Air Arm HQ.

He was obviously in the know as regards my personal affairs and service record, because, after a pause, he asked me in a kindly tone:

"What about your health?"

I told him I was as fit as a fiddle. It was the truth or pretty near the truth, for I always felt better in the North than I did in the South, the West or the East.

"Ah well, I suppose you'd better be put to use rather than hang about doing nothing at such a time," the Personnel Chief said reasonably if rather vaguely.

He had in mind, of course, my being used on the ground. "Catch me doing ground work. I'm going to fly," I said to myself as I watched his old but strong hand writing down and underlining my name on his desk diary.

I was appointed to an Arctic base within several kilometres of Polarnoye.

I am not going to say much about the air war in the North, though it was very interesting, since nowhere else were the qualities of the Russian airman displayed with such brilliance as here in the North, where, to all the difficulties and hazards of flying and fighting were added those of bad weather and six months of Arctic night. I heard one British officer say: "Only Russians can fly here." This was a flattering exaggeration, of course, but we had earned the compliment.

Combat conditions in the North were much more difficult than in the other theatres of air warfare. The German transports usually hugged the coastline, keeping as close to the cliffs as their draught would permit. It was hard to sink them, not only because transports, generally speaking, are hard to sink, but because it is impossible or well-nigh impossible to get a clear run-in at a transport which is under a cliff.

In July I went to Kirkenes with a load of bombs-with fair success, as the photographs showed. At the beginning of August I persuaded my regimental commander to let me go out "hunting" in search of German convoys. Paired with some lieutenant we sank a transport of four thousand tons. Strictly speaking, it was the lieutenant who did the sinking, as my torpedo, launched at too close range, slipped under the keel and went wide. But in that fight everything was put to the test, including my wounded leg, which behaved splendidly. I was pleased, although during the debriefing the squadron commander proved incontestably that this was just the way transports "ought not to be sunk". Two or three days later he had occasion to repeat his arguments, as I flew still lower over a transport, so low that I came home with a piece of the ship's aerial embedded in my wing. The transport—my first—was sunk, so that his arguments, while losing none of their cogency, acquired merely a theoretical interest.

To be brief, I sunk a second transport in the middle of August, one of six thousand tons, escorted by a patrol vessel and a torpedo boat. This time I was accompanied by the squadron leader himself and I noticed with amusement that he attacked from still lower than I did. Needless to say, he did not give himself a reprimand.

And so life went on—on the whole, not at all badly. At the end of October the Air Force Commander congratulated me on the award of the Order of Alexander Nevsky.

I already had friends at the base—the placid, taciturn, pipe-smoking navigator in the wide trousers turned out to be an intelligent, well-read man. True, he had little to say for himself, and that little was reduced to nil when we were in the air, but when asked, "Where are we?" he always answered with astonishing accuracy. I liked his way of getting onto the target. We were unlike each other, but you cannot help getting to like a man who shares with you every day the hard and hazardous work of flying and making torpedo attacks. If we were to meet death, it would be together, the same day and hour. And those who face death together, face life together.

I had other friends at the base besides my navigator, but this was not the friendship my heart was yearning for. No wonder such a heap of

unmailed letters had accumulated in those days-I was hoping that Katya and I would read them together after the war.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DOCTOR SERVES IN THE ARCTIC

I dreamt all night that I had been wounded again, that Doctor Ivan Ivanovich was bending over me and I was trying to say to him:
"Abraham, saddle, drink", but I couldn't, I was struck dumb. This was a recurrent dream, but the first one in which this long-forgotten sensation of dumbness was so vividly real.

And so, waking up before reveille, I found myself thinking of the doctor and recollected Romashov telling me that the doctor had come to visit his son at the front. I don't quite know how to explain it, but I felt vaguely disturbed by this memory, which had been on my mind for a long time. I went over it word for word and realised what it meant: Romashov had been telling me that the doctor was serving at Polarnoye.

The amazing thing is that the doctor, too, had been thinking about me on that very day and at that very hour. He assured me of it quite seriously. He had read the order concerning my decoration the day before and at first had not thought it was me. "There are plenty of Grigorievs in the world," he had said to himself. But the next morning, while still in bed, he decided that it must be me, like me, he made for the telephone immediately.

"Ivan Ivanovich!" I cried, when a hoarse voice, which it was hard to associate with the doctor, reached me as though fighting its way through the howling autumn wind which raged that morning over Kola Bay. "This is Sanya Grigoriev speaking. Do you recognise me? Sanya!"

I remained in ignorance as to whether the doctor had recognised me or not, because the hoarse voice changed to a rather melodious whistling. I roared myself red in the face, and telephone operator, appreciative of my efforts, informed me that "Medical officer, Second Class, Pavlov was reporting".

"What's he reporting? Tell him this is Sanya speaking!"

"Very good," said the telephone girl. "He asks whether you'll be at N. Base this evening and where can he find you?"

"I'll be here!" I yelled. "Let him come to the Officers' Club. Is that clear?"

The operator did not say anything, then something clicked in the earpiece and a voice, which did not sound like hers, growled:
"He'll come."

I was overjoyed, of course, to hear that the doctor was at Polarnoye and that I would be seeing him that night. Nevertheless, it remained a puzzle to me, why, on arriving at the club, I drank first a glass of white wine, then red wine, then white again, and so on. I kept within bounds, though, all the more so as the Air Arm Commander was dining in the next room with some war correspondent. But the girls of my acquaintance, who sat down at my table from time to time between foxtrots, laughed heartily when I tried to explain to them that if I had

learnt to dance my life would have shaped quite differently. As it was, my life was a flop because I had never learnt to dance.



It was in this excellent, though slightly wistful mood that I sat in the Officers' Club, when a tall, elderly naval man with silver stripes appeared in the doorway and started to pick his way between the tables. Doctor Ivan Ivanovich, I took it.

I may have been thinking how bent and old he looked and how grey his beard had grown, but that was only a mirage, of course. Actually, this was the mysterious old doctor of my childhood coming towards me with his glasses pushed up on his forehead, for all the world as though he were about to examine my tongue or peek into my ear.

"Sanya!"

We embraced, looked at each other, then embraced again.

"Have you been here long, Sanya?" the doctor was saying. "How is it we have not met all this time?"

"Three months. It's my fault, of course. May I pour you out a drink?" I reached for the bottle without waiting for his reply.

"You've had enough, Sanya," the doctor said gently, setting aside first his glass, then mine. "Tell me all about yourself. D'you remember Volodya? He's been killed," he added quickly, as though to show me that

I could now tell him everything. His eyes glistened with tears behind his glasses.

We sat with downcast heads in the brightly lit, noisy Officers' Club. The band was playing foxtrots and waltzes, and the brass rang out too loudly in the small wooden rooms.

"Where's Katya, what's happened to her?"

I told him how we had lost track of each other.

"I'm sure she's alive and well," the doctor said. "And searching for you day and night. She'll find you all right-if I know anything about a woman in love. Now you can pour me a drink. Let's toast her health."

It was time to go. We were the only people left in the restaurant. The evening was over-that was a fact. But, God, how reluctant I was to admit it, when there was still so much left unsaid between us. But what could you do! We went downstairs and got our overcoats. The warm, bright, slightly tipsy world was left behind us, and before us, pitch-black, lay N., over which a rude, bleak north wind ran riot.

CHAPTER THREE

TO THOSE AT SEA

Submariners were the big boys in those parts, not only because they had done so much at the beginning of the war, more perhaps than anyone else in the Northern Fleet, but because the peculiar routine of their lives, their attitudes, and the stresses of their combat activities placed an imprint upon the life of the whole township. Nowhere are men so equal in the face of death as among the crew of a submarine, where all either perish or vanquish. All combat work is hard, but the work of submarine crews, especially in midgets, is such that I wouldn't care to barter a dozen of the most hazardous air missions for a single cruise in a midget submarine. Even as a boy I used to think that among men who went down so deep in the water there was sure to be some sort of secret compact, like the oath which Pyotr and I had once sworn to each other.

Flying in company with another captain I succeeded in sinking a third transport at the end of August 1942. A midget commanded by the famous F. sank a fourth with my assistance. This would not be worth mentioning-I had no bomb-load at the time and merely reported to HQ the coordinates of a German vessel I had sighted-had not F. invited me to the "roast-pig party", which started off a train of events worth relating.

Who does not know the famous naval tradition of celebrating each sinking of an enemy ship with a gala dinner at which the commanding officer treats the victors to roast sucking-pig? The previous day a transport, patrol-vessel and a torpedo boat had been sent to the bottom, and the white-capped cooks, all hot and bothered, carried, not one, but

three whole sucking-pigs into the spacious officers' mess where a "U" table was set out at the head of which sat the admiral commanding the Northern Fleet.

The pigs, appetising, delicately pink, with pale, sorrowful-looking snouts, lay on dishes and the three commanders stood over them with big knives in their hands. That, too, was a tradition-the victors had to do the carving with their own hands. And the portions they carved! A huge chunk, stuffed with buckwheat and trimmed with fanciful shavings of horse-radish sailed down the table towards me. And I had to put it away, on pain of offending my hosts.

The admiral rose, glass in hand. The first toast was to the victors— the commanders and their crews. I looked at him-he had visited my regiment and I remembered the quick, youthful gesture with which he had thrown Ms head back as he received the report of the regimental commander. He was a young man, only four years my senior. I had also known him from my Spanish days.

"To those at sea!" was the second toast. Glasses clinked. The sailors drank, standing, to their comrades who were braving the perils of the Arctic night in the watery wastes. To good luck in battle and a steady heart in the hour of danger and decision.

Now the admiral was looking at me across the table—1 was sitting on his right, among the journalist guests, to whom F. was demonstrating with the aid of knife and fork how the torpedo boat was sunk. His eyes on me all the time, the admiral said something to his neighbour, and the latter, the flotilla commander, got up to propose a third toast. "Here's to Captain Grigoriev, who skilfully vectored the submarine onto the German convoy." And the admiral made a gesture to show that he was drinking to me.

I shall not list all the toasts that were proposed, especially as the journalists I have mentioned told the story of the "three roast-pigs" in the press. I shall merely mention that the admiral disappeared quite unexpectedly—he suddenly got up and went out. In passing my chair he leaned over, and without letting me get up, said quietly: "Please come and see me today, Captain."

CHAPTER FOUR

RANGING WIDE

The machine took off, and within a few minutes that hash of rain and mist, which we thought nothing of on the ground, became an important part of the flight, which, like all flights, consisted of (a) the mission, and (b) everything that hindered the execution of the mission.

We made a flat turn, banking slightly, and swung round onto our course.

Our mission, then, or, as the admiral called it, "special assignment" was this: A German raider (evidently an auxiliary cruiser) had passed into the Kara Sea and shelled the port of T. and was now lurking somewhere far in the East. I was to hunt her down and sink her, the

sooner the better, as a convoy of ours with a cargo of war materials was on its way through the Northern Sea Route and was now fairly close to this port. It was not difficult to imagine what havoc a big warship could cause in these peaceful waters.

I pulled up to five and a half thousand metres. But here, too, there was nothing but the same dreary cloud hash, which the Almighty himself seemed to be stirring up thick with a gigantic spoon.

So I had to find her and sink her. Doing the first was far and away the more difficult of the two. How astonished the admiral had been when I corrected almost all the islands of the eastern part of the Nordenskjold Archipelago on his chart. "Have you been there?" "No."

He did not know that I had been there yet not been there. The map of the Nordenskjold Archipelago had been corrected shortly before the war by the Nord expedition. I had not been there. But Captain Tatarinov had, and mentally I had followed in his wake a thousand times.

Indeed, nothing in life is done in vain. Life turns this way and that, plunges down, forcing its way like an underground river in the darkness and silence of eternal night, and suddenly emerges into the open, into the sunshine and light of day, just as my machine now has emerged from the welter of clouds. Aye, nothing in life is done in vain.

Always uppermost in my mind was the thought of what my life would have been in the North if I had found Katya and we had been living together at N.

She would wake up when, at three in the morning, I came home before setting out on a flight. She would be rosy, warm and sleepy. Perhaps, on coming in, I would kiss her in a way that would somehow be different, and she would understand at once how important and interesting was the task which the admiral had entrusted me with.

I had seen this a thousand times, but would it ever be like that again?
"Navigator, bearings!"

The pilot's course and the navigator's were three degrees out, but coincided to a T when cigarette-cases, pocket torches and lighters were turned out of pockets,

What had I been thinking about? About Katya. About the fact that I was flying to places where we had once planned to go together and from which I had been kept away for so long. Had I not known for certain, beyond doubt, that the time would come when I should be flying in these parts? Had I not charted to within half a degree the route which, as in a child's dazzling dream, the men from the *St. Maria* had trudged, breathing heavily, with eyes shut against the blinding glare? And in the lead, a big man, a giant in fur boots.

But this was romancing. I drove the thought away. Novaya Zemlya was close at hand.

You would be bored if I started telling in detail how we hunted that surface raider. To detect a camouflaged warship, a barely visible streak amid the boundless wastes of the Arctic seas, was no easy task. We flew from base to base for over a fortnight. One of the flights lasted seven hours. After scouring the Kara Sea in both directions we returned to Novaya Zemlya, but could not find it. It was as though these great islands had up till now been marked on the map by mistake. While the fuel lasted we flew around over the place in the black fog, and if the

wind had not, to our good fortune, torn a small bright hole in the fog, I should probably not have been able to finish this book. We made for this gap, and landed safely with the engine cut off.

Altogether it was a hard fortnight we spent on Novaya Zemlya. Every time we started out in the hope of finding the raider, though it had been plain to me for some time that we ought to be seeking it much farther East. We scoured the sea until fuel gave out and the navigator inquired phlegmatically: "Home?"

And "home" would unfold to our gaze-rugged, tumbling mountains, blue glaciers split lengthways, as it were, and ready to slide down into the bottomless snowy gorges.

Then came the moment when our stay on Novaya Zemlya end-ed-a wonderful moment, which is worth going into in somewhat greater detail.

I was standing outside a storehouse the roof of which was covered with birds' carcasses and on its walls were stretched the skins of seals. Two little Nentsi, looking like penguins in their fur garments with blind sleeves, were playing on the beach and I was chatting with their parents-a little girl of a mother and a father of similar stature with a brown head sticking out of his anorak. We were discussing international affairs, I remember, and although the analysis of Germany's hopeless position which I was giving them had been taken from a very old back number of *Pravda,* the Nenets was going to pass it on that same day to a friend of his who lived quite near-a mere two hundred kilometres away. His little wife, who was quite at sea in politics, nodded her shiny black head with its pudding-basin haircut and kept saying: "Velly good, velly good."

"Would you like to go to the front?" I asked the man.

"I like, I like."

"Aren't you afraid?"

"Why afraid, why?"

That was the moment when I saw my navigator running towards me-not just walking, but running along the shore from the point of land on which our plane stood.

"We're being assigned to a new base."

"Where?"

"To Zapolarie."

He had said "to Zapolarie", and though there was nothing impossible about our being reassigned to Zapolarie, that is, to the very area where I thought the raider had to be sought, I was flabbergasted. Why, this was my own Zapolarie.

"It can't be."

The navigator had reassumed *his* old imperturbable, unhurried manner.

"Shall I check it?"

"No need."

"When do we take off?"

"In twenty minutes."

CHAPTER FIVE

BACK AT ZAPOLARIE

It was some time before I found Doctor Pavlov's street, for the simple reason that in my day this street had had only one house standing in it-the doctor's, all the others existing only on the plan that hung in the office of the District Executive Committee. Now the little house in which I had once spent my evenings poring over the diaries of Navigating Officer Klimov was lost amid its tall neighbours. What pleasant, youthful evenings those had been! Those creaking floor-boards in the next room under the light tread of Volodya. Mrs Pavlova coming in-large, determined, open-hearted-and setting before me in silence a plate with a huge piece of pie.

Still unbent, unyielding to sorrow, she had only turned grey, and two deep creases hung over her down-drooping mouth.

"What am I to call you now?" she said, when we met in the little front garden. "You were a boy then. How many years is it? Fifteen[7] Twenty?"

"Only nine, Anna Stepanovna. And call me Sanya. I'll always be Sanya to you."

"A naval airman, with decorations," she said, as though she shared with me the pride of my being a naval airman with decorations. "Where have you come from now? From what front?"

"Just now from Novaya Zemlya, but before that from Polarnoye. And straight from Ivan Ivanovich."

"No, really?"

"My word of honour."

After a pause she said: "So you have seen him?"

"Seen him? Why, we used to meet very often. Didn't he write you about it?"

"He did," Anna Stepanovna admitted, and I realised that she knew about Katya.

But I did not need to check her as she had checked me when I started to speak about Volodya. She did not use any words of comfort, did not compare her grief to mine. She merely embraced me and kissed me on the head, and I kissed her hand.

"Well, and how's my old man? Is he well?"

"Quite well."

"D'you mind if I tell my friends that you've arrived. How much time have you got?"

I said that I was free till night. She placed before me bread, fish and a tankard of homebrewed wine, which they were very good at making in Zapolarie, put on a shawl, excused herself and went out.

It was rather thoughtless of me, though, to let Mrs Pavlova tell her friends that I had arrived. Within less than half an hour a car drew up outside the house and I was surprised to see all my crew in it.

"Sanya," the navigator said, "Comrade Ledkov has sent for us. Jump in and let's be off. We'll have breakfast at his place and then—"

"Ledkov? Just a minute... Ah, yes, of course! Ledkov!"

This was the District Executive Committee member for whom the doctor and I had flown to Camp Vanokan, where Ledkov lay with a

wounded leg. He was as well known among the Nentsi in the North as the famous Dya Vilka was among the inhabitants of Novaya Zemlya.

"Incidentally," the doctor had once told me, "he was interested to know whether you had found Captain Tatarinov. Remember, when we were expecting you with the expedition, well, he even rode out to some nomad camps to make inquiries of the Nentsi. According to his information a legend about the *St. Maria* should have been preserved in one of the clans."

It is not difficult to imagine how warmly we were welcomed to Zapolarie by Ledkov. My memory of him was vague, and I was surprised to find that the man who came out onto the porch to meet us was anything but old. After dinner we drove down to the sawmill, then visited the new health-centre, and so on. Everywhere we had something to eat and drink, and everywhere I spoke about Ivan Ivanovich. In the end I began to believe myself that without Ivan Ivanovich's contribution the defence of our northern sea routes might well have met with disaster.

Before take-off there were some things I had to attend to. I sent the navigator and gunners to the airfield, while I remained with Ledkov in his office at the D.E.C.

"Now tell me frankly," Ledkov said, "how's our old friend getting on out there? We need him here ever so badly. It could easily be arranged, you know." "What could?"

"To have him recalled and demobbed. He's above age." "No, he wouldn't stay," I said, remembering how sore Ivan Ivanovich had been when the flotilla commander had not allowed him to join a submarine crew on a dangerous mission. "He might agree to come on leave. But not to stay. Especially now."

The "now" was an intimation that the war would soon be over, but Ledkov interpreted it to mean "now that Volodya has been killed".

We were sitting in armchairs by a wide window, which presented a panorama of new streets running from the riverside to the taiga. Smoke rose from the sawmill, electric trolleys ran in and out among the timber stacks at the lumber yard, and a way out, untrodden, bluish-grey, stood forest upon virgin forest.

I asked him about his visit to the Nentsi camps where they were said to have preserved some legends about the men from the *St. Maria*. Was it true that he had gone there and questioned the Nentsi? "Yes, I went there. It was the camp of the Yaptungai clan." "Did you learn anything?" "I did."

I might have been seventeen again, the way my heart leapt. "What exactly?" I asked coolly.

" "I got the legend and wrote it down. I don't remember now where I put those notes," he said, running his eye over the revolving bookstand loaded with folders and rolled-up papers. "It runs roughly like this: In the old days, when 'father's father was alive', a man came to the Yaptungai family who called himself a sailor off a schooner that was wrecked in the ice of the Kara Sea. This sailor related that ten men were saved who wintered on an island north of the Taimyr. Then they made for the mainland, but on the way 'many, many die'. But he 'at one place not want to die' and he pushed on. And so he reached the Yaptungai camp." "Do they remember his name?"

"No. He died shortly. I took it down like this: 'He come, he say—I will live. He finish speaking and die.' "

A map of the Nenets region and part of the Kara Sea hung in Ledkov's office. I found the familiar route—to Russian Islands—Cape Sterlegov—the mouth of the Pyasina.

"Where do the Yaptungai have their grazing grounds?" Ledkov pointed them out. But even before he did so I had found the district's northern boundary and measured the distance with my eye.

"It was a sailor from the *St. Maria."*

"You think so?"

"Just figure it out. He said that ten men were saved."

"Yes, ten."

"Thirteen went off with Navigator Klimov. That leaves twelve in the schooner. Two of them-the engineer Tisse and the sailor Skachkov-died in the first year of drift. That leaves ten. But that's not the point. Even before, I could have shown you the route they took to within half a degree. The only thing I was not clear about was whether they had succeeded in reaching the Pyasina."

"And now?"

"Now I'm sure."

And I pointed to the spot where the rest of Captain Tatarinov's expedition would be found, if they were ever to be found anywhere on land.

"Anna Stepanovna, I'm so sorry, I shouldn't have stayed so long with Ledkov," I said, calling at her house that night and finding her waiting for me, the table laid. "But I must be going. I'll just give you a kiss and be off."

We embraced.

"When will you be coming back?"

"Who knows? Maybe tomorrow. Maybe never."

" 'Never' is a dreadful word, I know it," she said with a sigh and made the sign of the cross over me. "You should never say it. You'll come back and you'll be happy, and we old people will warm ourselves again at your happiness."

Late that night—that it was late night you could only discover by consulting your watch—we started out from Zapolarie. A reddish sun stood high in the sky. Fleecy clouds raced past, piling up, like steam from an enormous locomotive.

Could I ever have imagined that the day I had been waiting for all my life was now coming? I could not! The crew had checked the engines while I was away, but I was worried whether the check had been thoroughly carried out.

CHAPTER SIX

VICTORY

We took off at two in the morning, and at half past four we sank the raider. True, we did not see it sink. But after our torpedo hit it it lost steerageway and was swallowed up in a cloud of steam.

Briefly, it happened something like this: the ship was cruising in such a nonchalant manner that the navigator and I started an argument (which had better not be quoted in this book) as to whether the ship did not belong to our Northern Fleet. Having settled that it did not, we drew away from it—my navigator's favourite way of doing the job—then banked steeply to port and made straight for the target.

It's a pity I can't give a drawing of the rather intricate stunt I had to perform in order to drop my torpedo as accurately as possible. I had to make a second run-up, as my first attack was unsuccessful. Then we started to creep away. Creep is the word, because, as it soon became clear, the Germans had not lost time either.

During my first target run the gunner had shouted: "Cabin full o' smoke!"

We felt three jarring shocks during my second run, but there was no time to think of that, as I was already on top of the raider, my teeth clenched. Now, however, I had enough time to realise that our aircraft was crippled. Petrol and oil were siphoning away through holes and but for the navigator, who set going a new gadget in the nick of time, we would have been in flames long ago. The starboard propeller had changed over, while we were still on the target, from a little pitch to a big pitch, then to a very big one—a gigantic one, you might say.

We had our emergency boats, of course, and I could have ordered the crew to bale out. But we had tested these boats near Archangel on a quiet little inland lake, and had had to clamber out of the water, shivering like dogs. And here we had below us an inhospitable, cold sea covered with sludge ice.

I shall not list the brief reports concerning the state of the machine which my crew made to me. There were many of them, too many to my liking. After one of them, a pretty gloomy one, the navigator asked: "Sticking it out, Sanya?"

"You bet!"

We had entered a cloud, and in the double ring of a rainbow I saw below the clear-etched shadow of our plane. Unfortunately it was losing height. Without my having a hand in it, the plane suddenly turned sharply over on its wing, and if it were possible to see Death, we should undoubtedly have seen it on that wingtip pointed perpendicular to the sea.

I don't know how I did it, but I managed to right the machine. To lighten it I ordered the gunner to jettison the machine-gun drums. Ten minutes later the guns themselves followed them, toppling, into the sea.

"Sticking it out, Sanya?"

"Sure!"

I asked the navigator how far it was to the shore, and he answered that it wasn't far, about twenty-six minutes. He lied, of course, to cheer me up—it would take us all of thirty minutes to reach the shore.

This was not the first time in my life that I was called upon to count the minutes. There had been occasions when I had counted them with despair and rage. There had been occasions when they had lain upon my heart like round heavy stones, and I had waited in an agony of suspense for one more crushing minute-stone to roll off and away into the past.

Now I was not waiting. With a furious abandon that sent an exultant thrill through my heart I hurried and goaded them on.

"Will we make it, Sanya?"

"You bet we will!"

And we did. Some half a kilometre from the shore, which we did not even have time to look at, we pancaked into the water, and, strange to say, we did not go to the bottom. We had hit a sandbank. On top of all our troubles we now had icy waves drenching us from head to foot. But what did these waves matter or the fact that our aircraft had been staggering about in the sky for over an hour till we reached the shore, or the thousand and one new labours and troubles that awaited us, compared with that laconic phrase in the current communiquй of Sovinformbureau: "One of our aircraft failed to return."

What made me think that this was Middendorf Bay, and that consequently we had landed far from any habitation? I don't know. The navigator had had no time to work it out while we were passing over the sea—the only course that interested him was the shoreward one. And now he was too busy, as I had ordered the machine to be made secure, and we worked at this until we dropped from sheer exhaustion on dry patches of the beach among the sun-warmed rocks. We lay there quietly, gazing up at the sky—a clear, wide sky without a cloudlet in it-each occupied with his own thoughts. But each one's thoughts were tinctured by the same common feeling—victory.

We were so exhausted that we did not even have the strength to brush the clinging sand from our faces, and it dried in the sun and fell away in pieces. Victory. The navigator's dead pipe lay on his chest. He suddenly gave a loud snore and it rolled off. Victory. We wanted nothing but to gaze at the radiant blue majesty of the sky and feel the warm pebbles under our hands. Victory.

Everything was victory, even the fact that we were ravenously hungry and I couldn't force myself to get up and fetch the sandwiches from the plane which Anna Stepanovna had given me for the journey.

There is no need to describe how carefully we looked over the plane. Evidently the cause of the smoke which the gunner had reported was a shell, which had exploded in the cabin. Apart from a couple of hundred shot holes, the aircraft seemed in fairly decent shape, at least compared with the heaps of scrap iron I had often had occasion to land. The only thing wrong with it was that it could no longer be flown, and we did not have the means to put the engine right.

Over our dinner-we had an excellent meal: the first course, a soup made of dried milk, chocolate and butter, and second course, the same soup in dry form—it was decided:

(a) that the aircraft be made fast where it lay, embedded deep in the sand—in any case we could not raise it on to the shelving beach;

(b) that the gunner be left to guard the machine;

(c) that we go in search of people and assistance.

I forgot to mention that while we were limping across the sea one of us—I believe it was the radioman—noticed on the shore what looked like

a house or a wooden towerlike structure. It disappeared round a bend when we came inshore. It may have been a landmark, one of those structures raised on a shore which is seldom visited by ships. If so, it could be of little use to us. But if it was not?

On the other hand, we could stay where we were, and after our meal, lie down again among the rocks, choosing a cosy, sheltered spot, relaxing and gazing at the bluish ice-floes drifting past with the water running off them, glistening and tinkling. But our radio, worse luck, was smashed, and no matter what the dogged radioman did to it, it stayed mute as a stone.

In short, there was nothing for it but to push on. Where to? Obviously, towards the landmark, which might prove to be an electric lighthouse or a fog-warning station or something else of that kind.

"But first of all," I said to the navigator, "where are we?"

It took him no less than a quarter of an hour to answer that question; he gave coordinates which though differing from those I had named when Ledkov had asked me where I thought the remains of Captain Tatarinov's expedition could be found, were so close to that point—the point on which I had put my finger on Ledkov's map— that I couldn't help looking round me, as if expecting to see the Captain himself standing within two paces of me, behind that rock there...



PART TEN

THE LAST PAGE

CHAPTER ONE

THE RIDDLE IS SOLVED

Another book would have to be written to fully describe how Captain Tatarinov's expedition was found. Strictly speaking I had very many clues, much more than, for instance, the famous Dumont d'Urville had, when, as a boy, he showed with amazing accuracy where he would find La Perouse's expedition. I had it easier than he, because the life of Captain Tatarinov was closely interwoven with my own, and the conclusions which these clues led to concerned me as well as him.

This is the route he must have taken if it be accepted that he returned to Severnaya Zemlya, which he had named Maria Land: from 79°35' latitude, between meridians 86 and 87, to Russian Islands and the Nordenskjold Archipelago. And then, probably after wandering around a good deal, from Cape Sterlegov to the mouth of the Pyasina, where the old Nenets had come across the boat on the dog-sledge. Then to the Yenisei, because the Yenisei was his only hope of finding people and assistance. He had kept to the seaward of the offshore islands, going in as straight a line as possible.

We found the expedition, or rather what remained of it, in an area over which our planes had flown dozens of times, carrying mail and passengers to Dickson, and machinery and merchandise to Nordvik, and conveying parties of geologists prospecting for coal, oil and ores. If Captain Tatarinov were to come to the mouth of the Yenisei today he would meet dozens of great seagoing ships. On the islands which he passed he would have seen today electric lighthouses and radar installations, he would have heard nautophones guiding ships during a fog. Some three or four hundred kilometres farther upstream he would have come on the Arctic Circle Railway linking Dudinka with Norilsk.

He would have seen new towns which had sprung up around oil fields, mines and sawmills.

I mentioned earlier that I had been writing to Katya from the moment I arrived in the North. A heap of unposted letters were left at N. Base which I had been hoping we would read together after the war. These letters were like a diary kept, not for myself, but for Katya. I will quote from them only those passages which describe how we found the camping site.

"1. I was astonished to learn how close life had come up to this place, which had always seemed to me so infinitely far away. It lies within a stone's throw of the Great Sea Route and you were quite right when you said that they had not found your father because they had never looked for him. Between the lighthouse and the radio station there is a telephone line, a permanent one on poles. Mines are being worked ten kilometres to the south, and if we hadn't discovered the camp site the miners would have stumbled upon it sooner or later.

"It was our navigator who first picked up the piece of canvas from the ground. Nothing surprising about it! You can pick up all kinds of stuff on a seashore. But this was a canvas strap you harnessed yourself in to haul a sledge. But when the gunner found the aluminium lid of a saucepan, and a dented tin containing balls of string, we divided the hollow between the hills and the ridge into a number of squares and started going over them—each man his own square.

"I remember reading somewhere that a single inscription carved on a stone had helped scholars to reveal the life of a whole country which had perished long before our own era. Now this place, too, gradually came to life before our eyes. I was the first to spot the canvas boat, or rather to guess that this flattened pancake thicking out of the eroded earth was a boat; moreover, a boat resting on a sledge. In it lay two guns, a skin of some kind, a sextant and a pair of field-glasses, all rusty, covered with mould and moss. By the ridge which protected the camp from the sea, we found various articles of clothing, among them a mouldering sleeping-bag made of reindeer-skin. Evidently a tent had been pitched there, because the drift logs lay at an angle forming a square enclosure with the rocks. In this "tent" we found a food basket fastened with a strip of sailcloth and containing several woollen stockings and shreds of a blue and white blanket. We also found an axe and a "fishing-rod", that is, a length of twine with a hook at the end made from a bent pin. Some of the articles lay scattered round the "tent"-a spirit lamp, a spoon, a small wooden box containing various odds and ends, including several thick sail-needles, also home-made. On some of these objects the rubber stamp "Trapping Schooner *St. Maria"* or the inscription *"St. Maria"* could still be made out. But this camp site was completely deserted-there was not a soul there, living or dead.

"2. It was a home-made cookstove—a tin casing enclosing a bucket with a lid. Usually an iron tray was placed underneath for burning bear or seal fat. But there stood an ordinary primus heater. I shook it and found that it still contained some paraffin oil. I tried to pump it up, and the oil squirted up in a thin stream. Next to it we found a tin marked "Borsch. Vikhorev Cannery. St. Petersburg, 1912". Had we wished to, we could have opened that tin of borsch and heated it up on the primus-stove, which had been lying in the earth for nearly thirty years.

"3. We returned to the camp after a fruitless search in the direction of Galchikha. This time we approached it from the southeast, and the hills,

which we had previously seen as an unrelieved undulating line, now presented quite an unexpected appearance. It was a single large scrap running into stony tundra intersected by deep notches, as though excavated' by human hands. We walked along one of these hollows, and none of us at first paid any attention to the caved-in stack of driftwood between two huge boulders. There were only a few logs, not more than half a dozen, but one of them had a sawn end. It was this sawn log that struck us. Up till now we had believed that the camp had been situated between the rocky ridge and the hills. It could have been shifted, however, and before long we found that this was so.

"It would be difficult to enumerate half the things we found in this hollow. We found a watch, a hunting knife, several ski-sticks, two single-barrelled Remingtons, a leather vest and a tube containing some kind of ointment. We found the rotted remains of a bag containing photographic film. And finally, in the lowest part of the hollow, we found a tent, and under that tent, its edges still held down by drift logs and whalebone to prevent it being blown away in a gale—under this tent, which we had to hack out of the ice with axes, we found him whom we were looking for...

It was still possible to guess in what attitude he had died-his right arm flung out, body stretched out as if listening to something. He lay on his face, and the satchel in which we found his farewell letters was under his chest. Obviously, he had hoped that the letters would be better preserved under cover of his body.

"4. There could have been no hope for our ever seeing him alive. But until the word Death had been pronounced, until I had seen it with my own eyes, this childish thought had still lingered in my heart. Now it was gone, but in its stead another light burned up brightly—the thought that it was not for nothing, not in vain, that I had been seeking him, that for him there would be no death. An hour ago the steamer came alongside the electric lighthouse and the sailors, with heads bared, carried the coffin aboard covered with the tattered remains of the tent. A salute was fired and the ship flew its flag at half-mast. Alone, I wandered around the deserted camp of the *St. Maria* and here I am, writing to you, my own, dear Katya. How I wish I were with you at this moment! It will soon be thirty years since that brave struggle for life ended, but I know that for you he died only today. I am writing to you from the front, as it were, telling you about your father and friend, who had fallen in battle. Sorrow and pride for him fill my soul, which is stirred to its depths by this spectacle of immortality..."

CHAPTER TWO

THE UNBELIEVABLE

"How I wish I were with you at this moment"—I read and reread these words, and they seemed to me so cold and empty, as if I were in a cold, empty room, addressing my own reflection. It was Katya I needed, and not this diary—the living, bright, sweet Katya, who believed in me and loved me. Once, shaken by the fact that she had turned her back on me at her mother's funeral, I had dreamt of coming to her, like the Gadfly, throwing at her feet the evidence that proved me to have been right. Afterwards the whole world had learnt of her father through me and he had become a national hero. But for Katya he remained her father-who, if not she, was to be the first to learn that I had found him? Who, if not she, had told me how wonderful everything would be if the fairy-tales we believed in still came true on earth? Amid the cares, labours and perturbations of the war I had found him. Not a boy, fascinated by a dim, glamorous vision of the Arctic which illumined his mute, half-conscious world, not a youth striving with youth's stubbornness to have his own way-no, it was as a mature man, who had experienced everything, that I stood confronting a discovery destined to become part of the history of Russian science. I was proud and happy. But a surge of bitterness rose up inside me at the thought that it could all have been different.

I did not get back to my regiment until the end of January, and the very next day I was summoned to Polarnoye to report to the commander of the Northern Fleet.

Our launch entered the bay, and the town unfolded to my gaze, all white, pink and snowy. It stood on the steep, grey hillside as if on a pedestal of beautiful granite rocks. White little houses with porch steps running out in different directions were arranged in terraces, while along the bay front, forming a semi-circle, stood big stone houses. In fact, as I found out afterwards, they were called "compass houses", as though a gigantic compass had described this semi-circle over Catherine's Bay.

I climbed the flight of steps which passed under an arch thrown between these houses and saw the whole bay from shore to shore. The inexplicable agitation under which I had been labouring all that morning gripped me anew with extraordinary farce. The bay was dark green and impenetrable, with only a faint glimmer shed by the sky. There was something very remote, southern, reminiscent of a highland lake in the Caucasus, about this land-locked bay-except that on the far side a line of low hills, covered with snow, ran out into the distance with low trees making here and there a delicate black tracery against their dazzling background.

I do not believe in intuition, but that was the word that sprung to my mind as, stirred by the beauty of Polarnoye and Catherine's Bay, I stood by the compass houses. It was as if the town that appeared before me were my home, which until then I had only seen in dreams and sought in vain for so many long years. I found myself thinking with a thrill of

excitement that something was bound to happen here, something good for me, perhaps the best thing to happen to me in all my life.

There was nobody at HQ yet. I had come before office hours. The night-duty officer said that, as far as he knew, I had been ordered to report at 10 p.m., whereas it was now only seven-thirty.

I went to look up the doctor-not at the hospital, but in his rooms.

Of course, he lived in one of those white little houses arranged in terraces on the hillside. They had looked much prettier from the sea. Here was Row One, but I needed Row Five, House No. 7.

Like the Nentsi, I walked along thinking all but aloud of what I was seeing. A group of Englishmen overtook me. They wore funny winter caps resembling those our old Russian coachmen used to wear and long, khaki robe-like affairs and it set me thinking how little they knew our Russian winters. A boy in a white fluffy fur coat walked along, grave and chubby, with a toy spade over his shoulder. A be-whiskered sailor caught him up and carried him on a few steps, and it set me thinking that there were probably very few children in Polarnoye.

House No. 7, Row 5, differed in no way from any of its neighbours on the right or left, except perhaps that its front steps were barely visible under a coating of slippery ice. I took them at a run and collided with some naval men, who came out onto the porch at that moment. One of them slid carefully down the steps, remarking that "inability to take one's bearings in a Polar-night situation points to a deficiency of vitamins in the body". They were doctors. This was Ivan Ivanovich's home all right.

I went into the hall, pushed one door, then another. Both rooms were empty, smelt of tobacco, had unmade beds in them and things lay scattered about, masculine-like. There was something hospitable about those rooms, as if their occupants have purposely left the doors open.

"Anybody here?"

There was no need to ask. I went out into the street again.

A woman with her skirt hitched up was rubbing her bare feet with snow. I asked her whether this was house No 7.

"Who may you be wanting?"

"Doctor Pavlov."

"I daresay he's still asleep," the woman said. "You go round the house, that's his window over there. Knock hard!"

It would have been simpler to knock at the doctor's door, but I complied nevertheless and walked round to the window. The house stood on a slope and the window at the back stood rather low over the ground. It was covered with hoarfrost, but when I knocked and peered in, shading my eyes with my hand, I thought I saw a shape like a woman's figure. Like a woman bending over a basket or a suitcase. She straightened up when I knocked and came over to the window. She, too, shaded her eyes with her hand, and through the blurred frostwork of the window I saw a blurred face.

The woman's lips stirred. She did nothing, just moved her lips. She was barely visible behind that snowy, misted, murky glass. But I recognised her. It was Katya.

CHAPTER THREE

IT WAS KATYA

How can I describe those first minutes, the speechless rapture with which I gazed into her face, kissed it and gazed again, asked questions only to interrupt myself, because everything I asked about had happened ages ago, and terrible though it was to know how she had suffered and starved, almost to death, in Leningrad, and had given up hope of ever seeing me again, all this was over and done with, and now there she stood before me and I could take her in my arms-God, I could hardly believe it!

She was pale and very thin, and something new had come into her face, which had lost its former severity.

"You've had your hair cut, I see?"

"Yes, a long time ago," she said. "Back in Yaroslavl, when I was ill."



She had not only had her hair cut, she was a different woman. But just now I did not want to think about that—everything was whirling around, the whole world, we, this room, which was an exact replica of those other two, with its things scattered about, with Katya's open suitcase, from which she had been taking something out when I knocked, and the doctor too, who, it appears, had been there all the time, standing in a corner wiping his beard with his handkerchief, and now started to tiptoe out of the room, but I stopped him. But the main thing, the most important thing-Katya was in Polarnoye! How had she come to be in Polarnoye?

"My God, I've been writing to you every day!" she said. "We just missed each other in Moscow. When you called on Valya Zhukov I was queuing for bread in Arbat."

"No?"

"You left him a letter, and I dashed off to look for you-but where? Who could have imagined that you would be going to see Romashov!"

"How do you know I went to see Romashov?"

"I know everything, darling!"

She kissed me. "I'll tell you everything."

And she told me that Vyshimirsky, frightened to death, had sought out Ivan Pavlovich and told him that I had had Romashov arrested.

"But who's this Rear-Admiral R.?" she said. "I wrote to you, care of him, and then to him personally, but he never answered. Didn't you know that you were coming here? Why did I have to write to you through him?"

"Because I didn't have an address of my own. I left Moscow to look for you."

"Where?"

"At Yaroslavl. I was in Yaroslavl."

"Why didn't you write to Korablev when you came here?"

"I don't know. My God, is it really you? Katya?"

We were walking up and down with our arms round each other, stumbling over things, again and again asking "why?" "why?" and there were as many of these "whys" as there were causes which had parted us at Leningrad, prevented us from running into each other in Moscow, and now thrown us together in Polarnoye, where I had now come for the first time and where only half an hour ago it was impossible to imagine Katya being.

She had heard about my discovery of the expedition from the TASS reports which appeared in the newspapers. She had got in touch with the doctor and he had helped to get a permit to come to Polarnoye. But they did not know where to write to me-even if they did know, it is hardly likely that any mail would reach me at the camp site of Captain Tatarinov's expedition!

The doctor disappeared, then reappeared with a hot kettle, and though he couldn't stop the speed with which the world was whirling around us, he did make us sit down side by side on the sofa, and treated us to some tooth-breaking hardtack. Then he fetched a billy-can of condensed milk and set it on the table, apologising for the tableware.

Then he went away. I did not detain him this time, and we were left alone in that cold house, with its kitchen cluttered with empty tins and

dirty dishes, its hallway covered with snow that did not melt. Why were we in this house, through the windows of which we could see the rolling hills and the slack water moving importantly between the steep, snowy shores? But this was yet another "why?" to which I did not bother to seek an answer.

On going out the doctor had handed me some electric gadget. I immediately forgot about it and remembered it only when, laughing at something, I saw dense steam billowing from my mouth and melting slowly in the air, like from a horse standing out in the frost. The gadget was an electric fire, obviously of local workmanship, but a very good one. The room quickly got warm. Katya wanted to tidy up, but I did not let her. I gazed at her. I held her hands in a tight grip, as though fearing that she might disappear as suddenly as she had appeared.

On my way to the doctor's I had noticed that the weather was changing, and now, when I left the house—because it was already a quarter to ten—the cold, humming wind had dropped, the air was no longer limpid, and soft snow fell heavily and quickly-all signs of coming snowstorm.

To my surprise, they already knew at HO that Katya had arrived. The commander knew it, too-why else should he have greeted me with a smile? Very briefly I told him how we had sunk the raider. He did not ask me any questions, merely said that I was to give a report about it before the War Council that evening. What he was interested in was the *St. Maria* expedition.

I began in a restrained, rather embarrassed manner-though the fact that the expedition had been found during the performance of a combat mission would not have struck anyone who knew the story of my life as being odd. How was I to convey this idea to the fleet commander in a few words? But he was listening with such rapt attention, with such sincere, young interest, that I finally dismissed the thought of "a few words" and began telling my story simply— and quite unexpectedly, the effect was an authentic account of what really happened.

We parted at last, and then only because the admiral bethought himself of Katya.

I don't know how much time I spent with him-it must have been no more than an hour-but when I came out I did not find Polarnoye. It was hidden in a pall of whirling, blinding, whistling snow.

Luckily I was wearing *burki* *(*Burki-high* felt *boots.-Tr.)* *-even* so I had to turn the tops back above my knees. Talk about terraces-there wasn't a trace of them! Only a fantastic imagination could picture houses somewhere behind those black clouds of whipped snow, and in one of those houses, in Row 5, Katya laying the hardtack out on the electric fire to warm them, as I had advised her. In the end I got to the house, of course. The hardest thing was to recognise it. In little more than an hour it had turned into a fairy-tale dwarfie hut, standing lopsided and snowed up to the windows. Like a god of snowstorm I burst into the hall, and Katya had to brush me down with a whisk broom, starting from the shoulders, which were caked with frozen snow.

We had talked everything over, it seemed; twice we had approached the subject of the Captain's letters of farewell-I had brought them with

me to Polarnoye to show to the doctor; the rest of the material relating to the expedition I had left at my regiment. But we
avoided the subject of these letters and everything associated with them, as though we felt that in the joy of our reunion the time had not yet come for us to talk about them.

Katya had already told me all about little Pyotr-what a swarthy little chap he was, the very image of my poor sister. We had already discussed what to do about Grandma, who had quarrelled with Farm Manager Perishkin and rented a "private apartment" in the village. I had already learnt that Pyotr Senior had been wounded a second time, had received a decoration and returned to the front—in Moscow Katya had chanced to meet the commander of his battalion, a Hero of the Soviet Union, who had told her that Pyotr "didn't give a damn for death", a phrase which had startled Katya. I had learnt about Varya Trofimova, too, and that if things worked out the way Katya thought they would "it would be the greatest ever happiness for both of them". Changes had been made in the room, too—things were arranged more comfortably, looking as if they were grateful to Katya for having brought warmth to this cold, masculine abode. Some five or six hours had passed since that wonderful, momentous change had taken place. The entire world of our family life, lost to us for so long-for eighteen desolate months-had come back at last, and I had not yet got used to the idea that Katya was with me once more.

"D'you know what I've been thinking most of the time? That I didn't love you enough and kept forgetting how hard you had it with me."

"And I was thinking how hard you had it with me," Katya said. "When you used to go away and I worried about you I was still happy, despite all those anxieties, cares and fears."

While we were talking she went on arranging things, as she always did in hotels, even in trains, wherever we went together. It was the habit of a woman accustomed to moving with her husband from place to place-and what a pity, tenderness and remorse I felt towards her for that pathetic habit.

God, how I had missed her! I had forgotten everything! Forgotten, for instance, how she did her hair for the night, plaiting it into pigtails. Her hair was still short, and the pigtails were comical little things. Yet she plaited them, uncovering her beautiful little ears-even these I had forgotten.

We talked on after a long silence, now in whispers and about quite another matter. This other matter was Romashov.

I remember having read somewhere about palimpsests, that is, ancient parchments from which later scribes erased the text to write bills and receipts on them, and years later scholars discovered the original writings, which sometimes belonged to the pen of poets of genius.

It was like a palimpsest, when Katya gave me Romashov's version of what had happened in the aspen wood, and I erased this lie as if with a rubber and beneath it the truth came through. I saw and explained to her this dirty trick of his, which he had used twice-first to prove to Katya that he had saved my life, then to show me that he had saved hers.

I related to her word for word our last conversation at his flat, and Katya was astonished at Romashov's confession, which explained the cause of all my failures and resolved the riddles which had always weighed upon her heart.

"Did you put it all down in writing?"

"Yes. I set it out like an examination record and made him sign it."

I repeated his account of how he had been watching my every step in life, tormented by envy, which has racked his mean, restless soul ever since his schooldays. I said nothing, however, about the magnificent portrait of Katya hanging over his desk. I said nothing because this love of his was an insult to her.

She listened to me with a sombre face, her eyes burning. She took my hand and pressed it hard to her bosom. She was pale with emotion. She hated Romashov twice or thrice as much perhaps for the very thing I did not want to talk about. As for me, he was remote and insignificant, and it was cheering to think that I had got the better of him.

My wife was asleep, her cheek pillowed on her hand. My clever, lovely wife, who, heavens knows why, had always loved me with this undying love. She was sleeping, and I could gaze my till at her, thinking that we were alone now and though this short, happy night would end all too soon, we had wrested it from the raging blizzard that was sweeping through the world.

I had to be up at six and had prevailed upon Katya not to have me waken her. We had even kissed goodbye to each other the night before. But when I opened my eyes I found her already washing up, clad in her dressing gown and propping the wet plates against the electric fire. She knew what military service I was doing, but we never talked about it. Only when I bestirred myself, leaving my glass of tea unfinished, did she ask, as she used to do, whether I was taking my parachute. I said I was.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FAREWELL LETTERS

On leaving the house I gave Katya the Captain's letters. Once before, at Ensk, in Cathedral Gardens, I had left her alone to read one of the letters which Aunt Dasha and I had found in the bag of the drowned postman. I had stood beneath St. Martin's tower and turned cold as I mentally went through that letter with her line by line.

Now I would not be seeing her for several days. Even so, we would be reading together again, and I knew that Katya would feel me breathing at her shoulder.

Here are the letters.

Captain 1st Class P.S. Sokolov, Hydrographical Board, St. Petersburg

My dear Pyotr Sergeyevich,

I hope this letter reaches you. I am writing it at the moment when our voyage is nearing its end, and, I regret to say, I am finishing it in solitude. I do not think anybody in the world could have coped with what we have had to endure. All my companions have died one after the

other, and the reconnaissance party which I sent to Galchikha did not return.

I am leaving Maria and your god-daughter in difficult straits. If I knew that they were provided for I would not be greatly distressed at leaving this world, because I feel that our country has no reason to be ashamed of us. We were very unlucky, but we made up for it by returning to the land we had discovered and studying it to the best of our ability.

My last thoughts are of my wife and child. I dearly hope that my daughter makes a success of her life. Help them, as you helped me. Dying, I think with deep gratitude of you and of the best years of my youth when I worked under your guidance.

I embrace you. *Ivan Tatarinov*.

To: His Excellency, the Head of the Hydrographical Board, From: I. L. Tatarinov, Chief of the *St. Maria* Expedition

Report

I herewith beg to bring to the notice of the Hydrographical Board the following:

On March 16th, 1915, in observed latitude 79°08' 30" and longitude 89°55' 00" East of Greenwich, from the drifting ship *St. Maria,* in good visibility and a clear sky, there was sighted east of the ship an unknown large stretch of land with high mountains and glaciers. Signs indicating the presence of land in this area had been observed prior to this: as early as August, 1912, we had seen large flocks of geese flying from the North in a N.N.-E-S.S.-E direction. At the beginning of April 1913 we had seen a sharp-cut silvery strip of the N.E. horizon, and above it clouds of a very queer shape, resembling distant mountains shrouded in mist.

The discovery of land stretching in a meridional direction gave us the hope of abandoning ship at the first favourable opportunity in order, on coming ashore, to follow the coastline in the direction of the Taimyr Peninsula and beyond, as far as the first Siberian settlements at the mouths of the rivers Khatanga and Yenisei as the case may be. By now the direction of our drift was clear beyond doubt. Our ship was drifting together with the ice on a general course North 7° by West. Even in the event of this course changing to a more westerly one, that is, parallel to the drift of Nansen's *Fram,* we should not get free of the ice before the autumn of 1916, and our provisions would last only until the summer of 1915.

After numerous difficulties irrelevant to this report we succeeded on May 23, 1915, in stepping ashore on the newly discovered land in latitude 81°09' and longitude 58°36'. This was an ice-covered island, indicated by the letter A on the attached chart. It was not until five days later that we succeeded in reaching the second, very large, island, one of three or four comprising the newly discovered land. The astronomical position finding made on a jutting cape of this island and marked by the letter G, gave the co-ordinates 80°26' 30" and92°08'00".

Moving southward along the shores of this unknown land I explored the coast between parallels 81 and 79. In its northern part the coast is a low-lying stretch under an extensive icecap. Farther south it rises and becomes free of ice. Here we found driftwood. At latitude 80° we found

a broad strait or bay extending from the point indicated by the letter S in an E.S.-E. direction.

From the point marked by the letter F. the coastline turns sharply S.S.-W. I intended to explore the southern shore of the newly discovered land, but by that time it was decided that we proceed along the coast of Khariton Laptev in the direction of the Yenisei.

In informing the Board of my discoveries I consider it necessary to point out that the observation for longitude may not be quite reliable, as the ship's chronometers, though carefully looked after, have not been corrected for more than two years.

Ivan Tatarinov

Enclosed: 1. A certified copy of the *St. Maria's* log.

2. Copy of chronometric record.

3. Canvas-bound notebook with calculations and survey data.

4. Map of the surveyed land. June 18th, 1915, Camp on Island 4 in Russian Archipelago.

Dear Maria,

I'm afraid it's all up with us. I am not even sure that you will ever read these lines. We cannot go any further, we freeze as we move or halt, and cannot get warm even when we eat. My feet are very bad, especially the right one, and I don't even know how and when it got frost-bitten. By force of habit I write "we", though it is three days now since poor Kolpakov died. I can't even bury him because of the blizzard. Four days of blizzard has proved too much for us.

It will soon be my turn, but I am not the least afraid of death, evidently because I have done all I could and more to stay alive.

I feel very guilty about you, and this thought is the most painful, though there are others not much easier.

How much anxiety and sorrow you have suffered these years— and now this, the greatest blow of all, on top of them. I don't want you to consider yourself tied down for life. If you meet a man with whom you feel you will be happy, remember that this is my wish. Tell Nina Kapitonovna this. I embrace her and ask her to help you as much as she can, especially with Katya.

We had a very hard voyage, but we stood up to it well and would probably have coped with our task had we not been delayed by supply problems and had not these supplies been so bad.

My darling Maria, how will you get along without me! And Katya, Katya! I know who could help you, but in these last hours of my life I do not want to name him. I didn't have a chance to tell him to his face everything that had been rankling in my breast all these years. He personified for me that force that kept me bound hand and foot, and it makes me feel bitter to think of all I could have accomplished if I had been-I would not say helped-but at least not hindered. What's done cannot be undone. My one consolation is that through my labours Russia has discovered and acquired large new territories. I cannot tear myself away from this letter, from my last conversation with you, dear Maria. Look after our daughter, don't let her grow up lazy. That is a trait of mine. I was always lazy and too trustful.

Katya, my little daughter! Will you ever learn how much I thought about you and how I wanted to have at least one more look at you before I died?

But enough. My hands are cold, otherwise I would go on writing and writing. I embrace you both.

Yours forever.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE LAST PAGE

Looking back on the winter of 1943-1944 at Polarnoye I see that it was the happiest winter we had ever had together. This may seem strange considering that nearly every other day I flew out to bomb German ships. But it was one thing to fly on missions without knowing what had become of Katya, and quite another, to know that she was at Polarnoye, alive and well and that in a day or two I would see her pouring out tea at table. A green silk lampshade to which Ivan Ivanovich had pinned the little paper devils cut out of thick paper hung over his table, and everything that Katya and I took delight in that memorable winter is floodlit by that bright circle cast by the green shade, leaving all the fret and worry hidden away outside in the dark corners.

I remember our evenings, when, after long, vain attempts to get in touch with the doctor, I caught the first launch that came along and went to Polarnoye, where friends gathered within that circle of light, no matter how late the hour. Who thought of night when the day was night too!

Never before had I talked, drunk and laughed so much. The feeling that had come over me when I first saw Katya here seemed lodged in my heart now for all time—and the whole world went hurtling along. Whither? Who knows! I believed that it was towards happiness.

The three of us—the doctor, Katya and I—spent all our free time studying and sorting the records of the *St. Maria* expedition.

I don't know which was the more difficult-developing the films or reading the documents of the expedition. A film, as we know, is liable to fade with the years, and that is why the makers usually indicate the date limit after which they cannot guarantee full quality. For the *St. Maria* films this date was February 1914. Moreover, the metal containers were full of water and the films were soaked through and had evidently been in that condition for years. The Navy's best photographers declared it to be a hopeless case, and even if they (the photographers) were wizards they would never be able to develop the film. I persuaded them to try. As a result, out of hundred and twelve photographs, dried with infinite precautions, about fifty were adjudged "worth further handling". After repeated printings we succeeded in obtaining twenty-two clear pictures.

I had once succeeded in deciphering Navigator Klimov's diary, written in a crabbed, illegible, sprawling hand and smeared with seal-oil. Still they had been separate pages in two bound notebooks. Not so Tatarinov's papers. Apart from his farewell letters, which were better preserved, his papers were found in the form of a compact pulpy mass, and transforming this into a chronometric record, a logbook, maps, charts and survey data, was, of course, beyond my powers. This was done in a special laboratory under expert supervision. No room will be found in this book for a detailed account of what was found in the canvas-bound notebook which Captain Tatarinov had listed among his enclosures. I will only say that he managed to draw deductions from *his* observations and that the formulas which he put forward enabled us to

calculate the speed and direction of the ice drift in any part of the Arctic Ocean. This seems
almost incredible, considering the comparatively short drift of the *St. Maria* which took place in areas which do not seem to offer any data for such far-reaching deductions. But then the insight of genius does not always need many facts to work upon.

"You have read the life of Captain Tatarinov," I had said to myself, "but its last page has remained sealed."

"This is not the end yet," had been my answer. "Who knows, there may come a time when I shall succeed in turning and reading that page too."

That time had come. I had read it, and found it immortal.

CHAPTER SIX

THE HOME COMING

In the summer of 1944 I was granted leave, and Katya and I decided to spend three weeks in Moscow and the fourth in Ensk, visiting the old folk.

We arrived on July 17-a memorable date. It was the day the huge column of German prisoners-of-war passed through Moscow.

We had light suitcases and so decided to make our way to the centre of the city by Metro, but when we came out of the Metro station on Leningradsky Prospekt we were unable to cross the road for a good two hours. First we stood, then, getting tired, we sat down on our suitcases, then stood up again. And still they came on. The clean-shaven generals with sickly arrogant faces, among whom were some notorious torturers and hangmen, must have been at Krimsky Bridge, miles away, but the soldiers kept on coming and coming, shambling along—some in rags and barefooted, others with their army coats thrown open.

I looked at them with curiosity. Like many other bomber pilots I had never set eyes on the enemy all through the war, unless it was when I dived on to a target-hardly a position from which you can see much. But now I was "in luck"-fifty seven thousand six hundred of the enemy, in ranks of twenty, passed before me in one lot, some of them gazing wonderingly around them at Moscow, which looked its best that radiant day, others staring down at their feet sullen-faced and indifferent.

Men from all walks of life, their every look and gesture were infinitely alien to us.

I glanced at Katya. She was standing with her handbag pressed to her bosom, deeply moved. Suddenly she kissed me tenderly.

"Was that your 'thank you'?" I asked.

"Yes," she answered gravely.

We had lots of money and so took one of the best suites in the hotel Moskva, a sumptuous affair with mirrors, paintings and a grand piano.

At first we were a bit awe-struck, but then found that it was not so very difficult to get accustomed to mirrors, carpets and a ceiling decorated with flowers and cupids. We felt very good in those rooms, which were spacious and wonderfully cosy.

Korablev, of course, came to see us the day we arrived, looking dapper in an embroidered white shirt which, with his smartly twirled moustache, gave him a resemblance to some great Russian painter—exactly which one, Katya and I couldn't for the moment remember.

He had been in Moscow in the summer of 1942 when I had knocked at that felt-covered door of his. He had been in Moscow and nearly went mad when he came home and found my letter telling him that I was going to Yaroslavl to look for Katya.

"How do you like that? To look for Katya, with whom I had gone along to the police station only the day before, because they didn't want to register her at the Sivtsev-Vrazhek flat!"

"Never mind, Ivan Pavlovich," I said. "All's well that ends well. I wasn't very lucky that summer. As a matter of fact I'm glad that we've met now, when everything is really well. I was black, gaunt, and half-crazy, but now you see before you a normal, cheerful man. But tell me about yourself. What are you doing? How are you getting on?"

Korablev was never good at talking about himself. But we did learn from him many interesting things about the school in Sadovo-Triumfalnaya, where events of such great moment in my and Katya's lives had once taken place. With every year that passed after leaving school, it receded from us farther and farther, and we had begun to find it strange that we were once those ardent children to whom life had seemed so bafflingly complicated. But for Korablev school had gone on. Every day he had leisurely combed his moustache before the mirror, picked up his stick, and gone off to give his lessons, and new boys had passed under the searchlight beam of his grave, loving, attentive gaze.

Oh, that gaze of his! I was reminded of Grisha Faber, who had declared that "the gaze is all-important" and that with a gaze like Korablev's he would have "made a career in the theatre in no time".

"Where is he, Ivan Pavlovich?"

"Grisha's in the provinces," Korablev said. "In Saratov. I haven't seen him for some time. I believe he's made good as an actor."

"He *was* good. I always liked his acting. He shouted a bit, but that doesn't matter. His voice carried, though."

We ran through the whole list of classmates. It was both sad and cheering to recall old friends, whom life had scattered throughout the land. Tania Velichko was an architect building houses in Smolensk, Shura Kochnev was an artillery colonel and had recently been mentioned in dispatches. But there were many of whom Korablev knew nothing either. Time seemed to have passed them by, leaving them in our memories as boys and girls of seventeen.

So we sat, talking, and meanwhile Professor Valentin Zhukov had phoned three times and had been given an earful for keeping us waiting, though he pleaded in excuse some new experiment with his snakes or fox cross-breeds.

At last he turned up, and stopped in the doorway with a thoughtful air, finger on his nose, wondering, if you please, if he had come to the wrong room.

"Come in, Professor, come on in," I said to him.

He ran towards me, laughing and behind him in the doorway appeared a tall-, portly, fair-haired lady, whom we had once known, if I am not mistaken, under the name of Kiren.

First of all I was interrogated, of course. It was a cross-examination, with Valya on the right and Kiren on the left of me. Why, in what manner and on what grounds had I broken into another person's flat, gone through all the rooms, and on discovering that Katya was living at Professor V. Zhukov's, had hit on the brilliant idea of leaving a note that was utterly senseless, since it contained no mention of where I was to be found and how long I would be in Moscow.

"That was her bed, you ass," Valya said. "And the dress on it was hers. Christ, couldn't you have guessed that only a woman's hand could keep my den so tidy?"

"That much I guessed all right."

Kiren burst out laughing, good-naturedly, I think, but Valya made big eyes at me. Obviously, the ghost of the mysterious Zhenka Kolpakchi with the variegated eyes still haunted that family hearth.

The women retired into the next room. Kiren was nursing her fourth child, so I daresay they had plenty to talk about.

We started talking about the war. There were already numerous signs that it would soon be over. Valya and Korablev listened to me with such an expression as if it was I who would be called upon in the very near future to report the capture of Berlin to the High Command. Valya asked why they were not forcing the Vistula and was deeply pained to hear me say I did not know. As for the North, to judge by the questions he put to me, I was in command, not of a squadron, but of the whole front.

Then Korablev began to speak about Captain Tatarinov, and lowering my voice a little so that Katya should not hear, I told them some details which had not been mentioned in the papers. Not far from the Captain's tent, in a narrow cleft between the rocks, we found the graves of the sailors. The bodies had been simply laid out on the ground and covered with large stones. Bears and foxes had got at them and scattered the bones-one skull was found three kilometres from the camp, in the next hollow. Evidently the Captain had spent his last days in the same sleeping bag with the cook Kolpakov, who had died before he did. The letter to Mrs Tatarinova was first addressed "To my wife" and then corrected "To my widow". A wedding ring was found on the Captain's right hand with the initials M.T. on the inside.

I got out of my suitcase and showed them a gold locket in the shape of a heart. On one side of it there was a miniature portrait of Maria Vasilievna, and on the other a lock of black hair. Korablev went over to the window, put on his glasses and examined the locket. He was so long at it that Valya and I ultimately went over to him and putting our arms round him from both sides led him back to his chair.

"Katya is the image of her!" he said with a sigh. *"This* December it will be seventeen years. I can hardly believe it."

He asked me to call Katya in and told her that he had gone to the cemetery in the spring, planted some flowers there and employed one of the caretakers to paint the railing.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TWO CONVERSATIONS

I had two things to attend to in Moscow. One was my paper to -be read before the Geographical Society on how we had found the *St. Maria* expedition, the other, my talk with the examining magistrate about Romashov. Oddly enough, these tasks were not unconnected, for while I was still at N. Base I had sent to the Procurator's Office a transcript of my talk with Romashov at his flat. I will begin with the second.

The general waiting-room was a dimly lit hall divided in two by a wooden barrier. Broad old-fashioned benches stood against the walls, and a variety of people—old men, girls, servicemen without shoulder-straps—were seated on them, waiting to be interrogated.

I found the office of my interrogating officer by the name on the door, and as it was still early, I occupied myself with shifting the flags on the map which hung in the waiting-room. It wasn't a bad map, but the flags were far behind the present line of the front.

A familiar voice arrested my attention—a well-rounded, mellow, pontifical voice, that instantly made me feel a poorly clad, grimy boy with a big patch on his trousers. The voice said: "May I come in?"

Evidently, he was asked to wait, because, after opening the door, Nikolai Antonich closed it again and set down on the bench with a slightly hurt expression. I had last seen him in the Metro in the summer of 1942, and he was the same as he was then—his manner lordly, dignified, patronising.

Whistling, I moved the flags about on the Second Baltic Front. Seventeen years had passed since the day I had said: "I'll find the expedition and then we'll see who's right." Did he know that I had found the expedition? Undoubtedly he did. But what he did not know-the newspapers had not said a word about it-was that among Captain Tatarinov's papers there had been found incontestable, irrefragable evidence proving that I had been right.

He sat with Us head lowered, hands resting on his walking stick. Then he glanced at me and an involuntary quick movement passed across *his* large, pale face. "He's recognised me," I thought, exultant. He had recognised me. He looked away.

He was considering at that moment what attitude to adopt towards me. A problem indeed. Evidently, he had disposed of it to his satisfaction, because he suddenly stood up and strode over to me, touching his hat.

"Comrade Grigoriev, if I am not mistaken?"

"Yes."

I don't think I had ever had such difficulty in pronouncing that short word. I, too, had my moment of hesitation in considering what my manner towards him should be.

"You haven't been wasting your time, I see," he went on, glancing at my medal ribbons. "Where do you come from now? On what front are you defending us humble toilers of the rear?"

"The Far North."

"Are you in Moscow for long?"

"On leave, three weeks."

"And obliged to waste precious hours in this waiting-room? Ah, well, it's our civic duty," he added. "I suppose you, too, have been summoned here in connection with Romashov's case?"

"Yes."

He paused. Oh, how familiar were those deceptive, pregnant pauses of his, and how, even as a boy, I had loathed them!

"That man is evil incarnate," he said at last. "I consider that society should rid itself of him, the sooner the better."

Had I been an artist I could have admired this spectacle of smooth hypocrisy. But being an ordinary layman, I felt like telling him that if society had rid itself in time of Nikolai Antonich Tatarinov it would not have had to mess about now with Romashov. But I said nothing.

So far not a word had been said about the *St. Maria* expedition, but I knew my Nikolai Antonich—he had come up to me because he was afraid of me.

"I've heard," he began tentatively, "that you have succeeded in bringing your undertaking to a happy issue. I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for all that you have done. But I hope to do that publicly."

This meant that he was coming to hear me read my paper and would try to make out that we were lifelong friends, he and I. He was holding out the olive branch. Very good. I must pretend that I am accepting it.
"Yes, I think I have been more or less successful." I said nothing more. But a faint touch of colour had come into his pale, plump cheeks-a sign of animation. The past was all forgotten, he was now an influential man, why should I not keep on good terms with him? Probably I had changed - after all, didn't life change people? I had become like him—I had decorations, I had made a success, and he could judge of me from his own experience, his own success.

"-An event, which at any other time, the whole world would have been talking about," he continued, "and the remains of the national hero-for such would have been the recognition my cousin merited-would have been brought in state to the capital and interred amid a vast concourse of people."

I said that Captain Tatarinov's remains rested on the shore of the Yenisei Bay, and that he himself would probably not have wished for a better resting place.

"Without a doubt. But I did not mean that, I meant the exclusiveness of *his* destiny. The fact that oblivion had been dogging his steps all his life, and but for us"-he said "us"-"there would hardly be a person in the world who would have known who he was and what he had done for his country and for science."

This was about the limit, and I was on the point of saying something rude to him, when the door opened and a girl came out of the interrogating officer's room and invited me in.

I had a feeling all the time that if the examiner had not been so young and attractive, she (for it was a woman) would not have questioned me

in such a pointedly dry manner. But then, her interest stimulated as I gave my story, she eventually dropped her official tone.

"Are you aware. Comrade Grigoriev," she began after I had told her my age, occupation, whether I had ever stood trial before, and so on, "what business I have summoned you on?" I answered that I was.

"You once made a deposition." Evidently she meant my interrogation at N. Base. "Some things there are not quite clear, and I want to talk to you first about this." "I'm at your service," I said. "Here, for example."

She read out several passages in which I had given my conversation with Romashov at his flat word for word.

"Am I to understand that when Romashov wrote his statement against you he was a tool in the hands of some other person?"

"That person has been named," I said. "It is Nikolai Antonich Tatarinov, who is waiting outside to see you. As to who was the tool and who the hands, I cannot say. That's your problem, not mine."

I lost my temper a bit, probably because she had politely referred to Romashov's denunciation as a statement.

"Well then, it is not quite clear what purpose Professor Tatarinov could have had in trying to stop the search party. He is an Arctic scientist and you would expect any plan for the search of his lost cousin to have his deepest sympathy."

I said that Professor Tatarinov could have pursued a number of ends. First of all, he was afraid that a successful search for the remains of the *St. Maria* expedition would confirm my accusations. Then, he was no Arctic scientist, but simply a type of pseudo-scientist who had built his career on the books dealing with the story of the *St. Maria* expedition. Therefore, any competition in this field affected his vital interests.

"Did you have serious reasons for hoping that a search would confirm your accusations?"

I answered that I did. But that no longer came into question, as I had found the remains of the expedition, and among them direct proofs which I intended to make public.

It was after this reply that my interrogator quickly climbed down from her official perch.

"Found the proofs?" she queried with genuine astonishment. "After so many years? Twenty, or even more, I believe?"

"Twenty-nine."

"What could have been preserved after twenty-nine years?"

"A good deal," I said.

"Did you find the Captain too?"

"Yes."

"Alive?"

"Of course not. We know exactly when he died-it was between the 18th and 22nd of June, 1915."

"Tell me about it."

I couldn't tell her everything, of course. But Professor Tatarinov waited long to be received, and no doubt had plenty of time to think things over and talk things over with himself before taking my place at the desk of this handsome, inquisitive woman.

I told her of things indictable and things non-indictable because of the offence having been committed so long ago. An old story! But old stories live long, much longer than appears at first sight.

She listened to my story, and though still an interrogator, she was now an interrogator who, together with me, read the letters which had been carried into our yard with the spring freshet, who together with me had copied out passages from polar exploration reports, and together with me had flown teachers, doctors and party functionaries out to remote Nenets areas. Navigator Klimov's diaries had already been perused and the old boat-hook found-the final touch, as I had then believed, completing the picture of evidence. Then I came to the war and fell silent, because everything we had lived through rose before me in a boundless panorama, in the depths of which there just glimmered that idea which had stirred me so strongly all my life. It was hard to explain this to an outsider, but I explained it.

"Captain Tatarinov appreciated what the Northern Sea Route meant for Russia," I said. "And it's no mere accident that the Germans tried to cut it off. I was a soldier when I flew to the place where the *St. Maria* expedition had perished, and I found it because I was a soldier."

CHAPTER EIGHT

MY PAPER

Everybody came to hear my paper, even Kiren's mother. Unfortunately, I do not remember the exact words of the little speech of welcome, with quotations from the classics, with which she greeted me. The speech was a bit longish, and it amused me to see the look of resignation and despair on Valya's face as he listened to it.

I seated Korablev in the front row, directly facing the speaker's desk—1 was accustomed to looking at him when I made speeches.

"Well, Sanya," he said gaily, "I'll hold my hand like this, palm downward, and you keep an eye on it when you speak. When I start drumming my fingers, it means you are getting excited. If I don't you're not."

"Ivan Pavlovich, you're a dear."

I wasn't in the least excited, though I did feel a bit nervous, wondering whether Nikolai Antonich would come or not.

He did. After hanging up my maps I turned round and saw him in the front row, not far from Korablev. He sat with *his* legs crossed, looking straight in front of him with an immobile expression. I thought he had changed these last few days-his face had a hangdog sort of look, with sagging jowls and a thin, wrinkled neck showing high above the collar. It was very pleasant, of course, when the chairman, an old, distinguished geographer, before calling on me to speak, himself said a few words about me. I even regretted that he had such a quiet voice. He said that it was to my "talented tenacity" that Soviet Arctic science owed one of the most interesting pages-and I took no exception to this either, especially as the audience applauded, loudest of all Kiren's mother.

I ought not, perhaps, have made such a long preamble dealing with the history of the Northern Sea Route, even though it was an interesting history.

I spoke about this rather lamely, often halting and forgetting the simplest words, and generally humming and hawing, as Kiren said afterwards.

But when I came to our own times and gave a general outline of the military significance of the North, I caught a glimpse of Katya far down the dark isle. She had been indisposed-having caught a cold—and had promised to stay indoors. But what a good thing, how splendid it was that she had come! It cheered me up immensely and I began to speak with greater confidence and assurance.

"It may seem strange to you," I said, "that in a time of war I should be talking to you about an old expedition, which ended nearly thirty years ago. It's now history. But we have not forgotten our history, and perhaps our main strength lies in the fact that war has not negated or arrested a single one of the great ideas which have transformed our country. The conquest of the North by the Soviet people is one such idea."

I hesitated for a moment, as I wished to speak of how Ledkov and I had surveyed the Arctic region, but this was remote from the subject, so I switched over, none too skilfully, to the Captain's life story.

I spoke about him with an indescribable feeling. As if it were I, not he, who had been that boy, the son of a poor fisherman, born on the shores of the Sea of Azov. As if it were I, not he, who had sailed before the mast in oil-tankers plying between Batum and Novorossiisk. As if it were I, not he, who had passed his examination for sub-lieutenant and had then served in the Hydrographical Board, suffering the slighting arrogance of the aristocratic officers with proud indifference. As if it were I, not he, who had made notes in the margins of Nansen's books and by whose hand was written down that brilliant idea: "The ice itself will solve the problem." As if his was not a story of ultimate defeat and obscure death, but, on the contrary, of victory and joy. The story of friends, enemies, and love was repeated, but life was different now, and it was friends and love, not enemies, who had won the day.

As I spoke I experienced a mounting sense of exhilaration verging on inspiration. It was as though I were looking at a distant screen and had sighted beneath the open sky a dead schooner buried in snow. But was she dead? No, there was a sound of hammering: skylights were being boarded up and ceilings covered with tarred felt in preparation for wintering.

Naval men standing in the aisle made way for Katya as she passed to her seat, and I thought it was only right that they should make way respectfully for the daughter of Captain Tatarinov. Besides, she was the best one there, especially in that simple tailored suit. She was the best, and she, too, in a manner of speaking, had a share in that fervour and exhilaration with which I spoke about the voyage of the *St. Maria*.

But it was time I passed on to the scientific aspects of the drift, and I prefaced it with the statement that the facts established by Captain Tatarinov's expedition had lost none of their significance today. Thus, from a study of the drift, Professor V., the well-known Arctic scientist, deduced the existence of an unknown island between the 78th and 80th parallels, and this island was actually discovered in 1935 just where V. had figured it should be. The constant drift-current shown by Nansen

was confirmed by the voyage of Captain Tatarinov, whose formulae of the comparative movement of ice and wind were a notable contribution to Russian science.

A stir of interest ran through the hall when I began to relate how we had developed the expedition's photographic films, which had lain in the earth for nearly thirty years.

The light went out, and on the screen appeared a tall man in a fur cap and fur boots strapped under the knees. He stood with head doggedly bent, leaning on his rifle, and at his feet lay a dead bear, its paws folded like a kitten's. It was as though he had stepped into that hall—a strong intrepid soul, who had been content with so little! Everyone stood up when he appeared on the screen, and the hush that fell upon the hall was so deep and solemn that not a soul dared breathe, let alone utter a word. And in this solemn silence I read out the Captain's report and *his* letter of farewell:

" 'It makes me feel bitter to think of all I could have accomplished if I had been-I would not say helped-but at least not hindered. What's done cannot be undone. My one consolation is that through my labours Russia has discovered and acquired large new territories...'

"But there is a passage in this letter," I continued when everybody had sat down, "to which I want to draw your attention. Here it is:

'I know who could help you, but in these last hours of my life I do not want to name him. I didn't have a chance to tell him to his face everything that had been rankling in my breast all these years. He personified for me all that force that kept me bound hand and foot...'

Who is that man whose name the Captain did not want to utter at his dying hour? It was to him that he referred in another letter: 'It can positively be said that we owe all our misfortunes to him alone.' It was of him that he wrote: 'We were taking a chance, we knew that we were running a risk, but we did not expect such a blow.' It was of him that he wrote: 'Our main misfortune was the mistake for which we are now having to pay every hour, every minute of the day-the mistake I made in entrusting the fitting out of our expedition to Nikolai...'"

Nikolai! But there are many Nikolais in the world!

There were even no few in this auditorium, but only one of them suddenly stiffened and looked round him when I uttered that name in a loud voice; and the stick on which he was leaning dropped with a clatter. Someone picked it up and gave it to him.

"If today I am going to give the full name of that man it is not because I wish to clinch an old argument between him and me. Life itself has settled that argument long ago. But he continues to claim in his articles that he has always been Captain Tatarinov's benefactor, and that even the idea itself of 'following in the steps of Nordenskjold', as he writes, was his. He is so sure of himself that he had the audacity to come here today and is now in this hall."

A whisper ran through the hall, then there was a hush, followed by more whispering. The chairman rang his little bell.

"Strangely enough, he has gone through life without ever having had his name spelled out in full. But among the Captain's farewell letters we found some business papers. There was one, which the Captain evidently never parted with. It was a duplicate of a bond under which: (1) On the expedition's return to the mainland all the spoils of their hunting and fishing belonged to Nikolai Antonich Tatarinov - named in

full. (2) The Captain renounced in advance any claims whatever to any remuneration. (3) In the event of the loss of the vessel the Captain forfeited all his property to Nikolai Antonich Tatarinov-named in full. (4) The ship itself and the insurance belonged to Nikolai Antonich Tatarinov-named in full.

"Once, in conversation with me, this man said that he recognised only one witness-the Captain himself. Let him deny those words now before all of us here, because the Captain himself now names him—in full!"

Pandemonium broke loose in the hall the moment I finished my speech. People in the front row stood up and those behind shouted at them to sit down, because they could not see him. He was standing, holding up his hand with the stick in it, and shouting: "I ask for the floor, I ask for the floor!"

He got the floor, but the audience would not let him speak. Never in my life had I heard such a furious uproar as that which broke out the moment he opened his mouth. Nevertheless he did say something, though nobody caught what it was, and then, thumping the floor with his stick, he stepped down from the platform and made for the exit. He passed down the hall in an utter emptiness, and the space through which he passed remained empty for a long time, as if nobody wanted to go where he had just passed, thumping his stick.

CHAPTER NINE

AND THE LAST

The carriage in this train was going only as far as Ensk, and that meant that all these people in the crowded, dimly lit carriage, who occupied every inch of free space, including the floor and the upper berths, would be getting out at Ensk. In the old days this would nearly have doubled its population.

We made the acquaintance of our travelling companions. They were girl students from Moscow colleges, who said they were going to Ensk to work.

"What sort of work?"

"We don't know yet. In the mines."

Not counting the old tunnel in Cathedral Gardens, which Pyotr had once assured me ran under the river with "skeletons at every step", I had never heard of anything like a mine there. But the girls were quite definite about their going to the mines.

After two or three hours, as usual, each compartment settled down to a life of its own, unlike that of its neighbours, as though the ceiling-high wooden partition divided not so much the carriage as people's thoughts and feelings. Some compartments were gay and noisy, others dull. Ours was gay because the girls, after mildly lamenting the fact that they had not succeeded in staying in Moscow for their summer field work and saying something catty about a certain Masha who had succeeded in

doing so, started to sing and all the evening Katya and I were regaled with modern war songs, some of which were very amusing. In fact, the girls sang all the way to Ensk, even in the night-for some reason they decided to go without sleep. The thirty-four-hour journey passed quickly enough as we dozed on and off to the sound of these young voices, singing songs now sad, now gay.

The train used to arrive early in the morning, but now it arrived towards the evening, so that when we got out, the little station struck me, in the dusk, as being nice and cosy in an old-fashioned sort of way. But the Ensk of former days stopped where the broad avenue of lime trees leading to the station ended. Coming out onto the boulevard, we saw in the distance a dark mass of buildings over which sped glowing clouds lit up from below. This, for Ensk, was such a strange townscape that I found myself saying to the girls that there must be a fire somewhere across the river, and they believed me because I had been boasting during the journey that I was a native of Ensk and knew every stone in the place. As it turned out, it wasn't a fire, but an ordnance factory which had been built at Ensk during the war.

I had seen the striking changes that had taken place in some of our towns during the war—those at M—v, for instance—but I had not known those towns as a child. Now, as Katya and I walked quickly down the darkening Zastennaya and Gogolevsky streets it seemed to me that these streets, which used to stretch lazily along the ramparts, now ran hastily upwards to join the ceaseless glowing motion of the clouds over the factory buildings. This was our first (and true) impression-that of war-geared town. To me, of course, it was still my old, native Ensk, but now I met it as one does an old friend, when one looks at the altered yet familiar features, and laughs with affection and emotion, at a loss for words.

We had written to Pyotr from the Arctic that we would be visiting the old folks and he counted on being able to arrange his long-promised leave for the same time.

No one met us at the station, though I had wired from Moscow, and we decided that Pyotr had not arrived. But the first person we ran into at the lion-guarded entrance to the Marcouse house was none other than Pyotr. I recognised him at once for all that he had been transformed from an absent-minded, wool-gathering old thing with a permanent question-mark expression into a bronzed dashing officer. "Ah, here they are!" he said as though he had found us at last after a long search.

We embraced, then he strode over to Katya and took her hands in his. They had their Leningrad in common, and as they stood there gripping hands, even I was far away from them, though there was probably not a person in the world nearer to them than I was.

Aunt Dasha was asleep when we burst into her room and must have thought she was dreaming. She raised herself on her elbow and regarded us with a pensive air. We started laughing and that brought her down to earth.

"Good heavens, Sanya!" she said. "And Katya! And the old'un is away again!"

The "old 'un" was the judge, and "away again" referred to that visit of ours five years ago when the judge had been out on circuit somewhere in the district.

I hardly need describe how Aunt Dasha fussed and bustled round us, how she grieved that the pie had to be made with dark flour and on some "outlandish lard". In the end we had to make her sit down while Katya took charge of the household and Pyotr and I volunteered to help her, and Aunt Dasha shrieked with horror when Pyotr dumped some food concentrates into the dough—"for flavour", as he put it-and I all but popped in some washing soda instead of salt. Oddly enough, the pastry rose well, and though Aunt Dasha tasted a piece and announced "not rich enough", the pie was not at all bad as a wartime product.

After dinner Aunt Dasha demanded that we tell her everything, beginning from the day and hour when we had parted from her at the Ensk railway station five years before. I persuaded her, however, that such a detailed report ought to be put off until the judge came home. Instead, we made Pyotr tell us about himself.

I listened to his story with emotion. I had known him for over twenty-five years, and he did not strike me at all as being now a different person as Katya had described him to me. The "artistic vision" that had always intrigued me in Pyotr and which distinguished him from the ordinary run of men, had now deepened, if anything.

He showed us *his* albums—for the last year Pyotr had been serving as a scenic artist with a frontline theatre. Here were sketches of military life, often hastily dashed off. But the moral fibre of our people, which everyone knows who has spent even a few days in the army, was caught in them with remarkable fidelity.

I had often stopped before unforgettable scenes of war, regretting that they vanished without a trace as one gave place to another. Now I was seeing them in bare outline, but none the less faithfully and brilliantly reproduced.

"There," Pyotr said with a good-natured smile when I had congratulated him, "and the judge says they're no good. Not heroic enough. My son draws too," he added, pushing out his lower lip, as he always did when pleased. "He's not bad, he has a gift, I think."

Katya got Nina Kapitonovna's letters out of the suitcase-the old lady was still living near Novosibirsk with little Pyotr-and Aunt Dasha, who had always been interested in Grandma, demanded that some of them be read out aloud.

Grandma was still living on her own after her quarrel with the Farm Manager, despite the fact that he had offered her apologies and asked her to come back. She had "thanked him and declined, as I had never been taught to sue for a favour", as she wrote. Having had the satisfaction of declining this invitation, she astonished the whole district by suddenly taking on a job in the local Recreation Hall.

"I am teaching dress-making," she wrote briefly, "and I congratulate you and Sanya. I sized him up long ago, when he was a little fellow. I fed him buckwheat porridge to make him grow. He's a fine boy. Don't you bully him, you've got a nasty temper."

This was in answer to our letter telling her that we had found each other.

"I didn't sleep all night for thinking of poor Maria," she wrote on receiving the news that the remains of the expedition had been found. "I thought it was for the best, her not knowing the terrible fate your father suffered."

Little Pyotr was quite well, and had grown a lot, to judge by his photograph. He resembled his mother more than ever. We thought of her and sat in silence for a long time, reliving as it were, the anguish of that senseless death. As far back as the spring Katya had taken steps to get a pass for Grandma and the boy to come to Moscow, and there was a hope that we should see them on our way back.

Our old idea, Katya's and mine, of all of us settling down in Leningrad as one family was repeated that evening more than once. A single family—with Grandma and the two Pyotrs. Pyotr Senior looked rather confused when, speaking of the flat which we had already received in imagination-and not just anywhere but in Kirovsky Prospekt-we assigned to him a studio in a quiet part of the flat where nobody would be in his way. I knew of one woman he did not mind being in his way, a woman of whom Katya spoke with enthusiasm. But that evening of course, nobody said a word about her.

The house was still asleep when the judge returned. He gave such a fierce growl when Aunt Dasha made to wake us that we had to pretend being asleep for another half hour. Just like five years ago, we heard him snorting and grunting in the kitchen as he washed and splashed about.

Katya fell asleep again, but I dressed quietly and went into the kitchen, where he was drinking tea, sitting barefooted, in a clean shirt, his head and moustache still wet from washing.

"I woke you up after all," he said, stepping up to me and hugging me.

Whenever I turned to my hometown and my old home he always met me with that stern: "Well, let's hear all about it!" The old man wanted to know what I had been doing and whether I had been living right during the years since we last met. Regarding me sternly from' under *his* tufted eyebrows, he interrogated me like the real judge he was, and I knew that nowhere in the world would I receive a fairer sentence. But on this occasion, for the first time in my life, the judge demanded no account from me.

"Four, I see?" he said, eyeing my decorations with a pleased look.

"Yes."

"And a fifth for Captain Tatarinov," he went on gravely. "It's hard to word it, but you'll get it."

It really was hard to word it, but apparently the old man had decided to tackle that in earnest, because the same evening, when we again met round the table, he delivered a speech in which he attempted to sum up what I had done. "Life goes on," he said. "You have come back to your hometown as grown-up, mature people, and you say you have difficulty in recognising it, it has changed so much. It has not merely changed, it has matured, the way you have matured and discovered within yourselves the strength to fight and win. But other thoughts, too, come to my mind when I look at you, dear Sanya. You have found Captain Tatarinov's expedition. Dreams come true, very often truth is stranger than fiction. It is to you that his farewell letters are addressed-to the man who would carry on his great work. And it is you that I see standing by right at his side, because captains such as he and you advance mankind and science."

And he raised his glass and drained it to my health.

We sat round the table until late into the night. Then Aunt Dasha announced that it was time to go to bed, but we did not agree and went out instead for a walk by the river.

The fiery-black clouds were still chasing each other over the factory. We went down to the river and walked to the Gap, beside which a thin, dark boy in a baggy trousers had once caught blue crabs with meat bait. Time seemed to have stood still, waiting patiently for me on this bank, between the two ancient towers at the confluence of the Peshchinka and the Tikhaya-and here I was back again, and we looked into each other's face. What lay ahead for me? What new trials, new labours, new dreams, happiness or unhappiness? Who knows. But I did not lower my eyes under that incorruptible gaze.

It was time to go back. Katya felt cold. We walked along the quayside, which was cluttered with timber, and made our way home.

The town was quiet and somehow mysterious. We walked along in silence, our arms round each other. I recollected our flight from Ensk. The town had been just as dark and quiet, and we so small, unhappy and brave, facing the unknown, frightening life that lay ahead of us.

My eyes were wet, but I did not wipe away those tears of joy. I was not ashamed of them.

EPILOGUE

A lovely scene unfolds from this high cliff, at the foot of which wild Arctic poppies thrust up their slender stems between the rocks. By the shore one can still see the mirror-like water, and farther out, open lanes amid the lilac-tinted icefields running out into the mysterious distance. Here the Arctic air seems extraordinarily limpid. Silence and vast open spaces. Only a hawk sometimes comes flying over the solitary grave.

The ice-floes drift past it, jostling and circling, some slowly, others faster, assuming fantastic shapes.

There, sailing along, appears the head of a giant in a silver gleaming helmet. One can make out everything-the green shaggy beard trailing in the sea, the flattened nose and the narrowed eyes under grey, bushy brows.

And here comes a house of ice from which the water rolls off with a tinkle of innumerable little bells. And following it, great festive boards covered with clean tablecloths.

They keep coming and coming without end!

Ships putting in at the Yenisei Bay can see this grave from afar. They pass it with flags at half-mast and their guns fire a salute whose echo rolls on and on.

The grave-stone is white, and it gleams dazzlingly in the beams of the Arctic's midnight sun.

At the height of a man these words are carved upon it:

"Here rests the body of Captain I. L. Tatarinov, who made one of the most daring voyages and perished in June 1915 on his way back from Severnaya Zemlya, which he had discovered.

"To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield!"

